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THE METHOD AS MEANS

AN ACTING SURVEY

By

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Introduction

AT CERTAIN moments of my life, I find myself regretting the fact that acting is not a science.

Science is so incontestable. There are specific propositions with unassailable conclusions and no one would dream of questioning them. Two and two makes four no matter what your culture, clime or political complexion. Who would dare project a thesis challenging such unchallengeable dicta? What reader could bring himself to seriously consider such an essay? No doubt about it, the irrefutable known quantity is a comfort.

Consider now the art of acting.

There are almost as many 'schools of acting' as there are practising instructors. These drama coaches, ranging from the exuberant English professor with a bent for 'dramatics' to the unemployed actor anxious to make a quick buck, pride themselves on their eclecticism. A little theory from Coquelin; some postulates from Gordon Craig; a dash of Antoine; a generous sampling of Stanislavsky, *et voila*!—an amalgamation of acting-theory without parallel.

No other art has a more articulate claque of attendant kibitzers. Pushkin, James, Shakespeare, Molière, Freud, Lamb, Kipling, Stendhal—everyone and anyone feels the need to make their contribution to the lore of acting theory. Critics, philosophers and other assorted seers are forever

finalising their *magnum opus* dealing with the metaphysical, socio-intellectual, political, economic, hygienic and therapeutic aspects of the performing art.

The acting profession has been appropriated by every calling imaginable. Social workers have discovered it helps children ease tensions and acquire that ' feeling of belonging '; psychologists have found psychodrama a useful means of demonstrating psychiatric problems and effecting mental cures. Advertisers regard acting merely as a sales expedient. Church groups and amateur companies have always believed the art of acting to be a commonplace and, by some inexplicable sense of ownership, have felt they could do with it what they would. Both factions have ruthlessly besmirched its professional significance.

In the old days, acting was a matter of ' being heard,' ' not turning your back to your audience ' and making sure the wig was glued on tight. Nowadays it is the subject of protracted discussion and endless literature; usually of an abstract nature, abounding in psychology and spiced with ponderous generalities concerning " truth," " beauty " and " art."

It is at about this point that the reader (manifesting the traditional intuition of his ilk) is demanding: and what exactly do you propose? If it's all been said, what manner of reiteration are you about to foist?

The fact is, very little of it has been said, and that imprecisely, over-intellectually and somewhat redundantly by a horde of verbose outsiders. The only worthwhile discussions concerning the art of acting are conducted in professional circles; around coffee-cups and midnight beer-mugs by practitioners of the art. By actors, producers and writers who, having been confounded by the complexities of the stage, speak precisely and coolly about the subject of their confusion. They are discussions that deal with the

vital factors of acting; the experiences of actors while acting; the observations of directors assiduously trying to concretise an artistic ideal using the most complicated equipment ever devised by nature: thinking-and-feeling human beings.

Why are their observations, comments, complaints and confusions more pertinent than the sea of verbiage written on the subject by countless literary seers? Because they are born of the very stuff of acting. It is shop-talk on the highest and most practical level.

Despite its apparent external manifestations, acting is a secret art and to a large extent everyone discovers the secret for himself. Because acting is *not* a science, and two plus two can equal anything from four to four hundred, one must stick to the subject. There is always the temptation to intellectually wander; to use the effects of acting as springboards into speculation which, though stimulating in itself, sheds no real light upon the problems of the craft.

* * * *

Although it is true that theory without practice is deadening and futile, practice entirely unrelated to theory is likewise unsatisfying. My intention here is not to provide theory as such, but simply observations which though they spring from theory can be appreciated outside a theoretical context.

It would be wrong to call this collection a text-book as it disclaims any deliberate attempt to teach. It would be equally wrong to consider it a series of essays on the drama as the ideas treated in these pages deal almost exclusively with the grimy business of acting-technique. If I were hard-pressed to form a definition, I would say that this is to be considered a series of insights and outlooks; a combina-

tion of aerial views and microscopic close-ups intended to provoke thought and initiate the mental process which ultimately influences acting. A kind of medley of ideas which relate to, hinge upon, revolve about and stem from the theatre-experience.

If I am charged with being polemical, I point out that my subject has been wracked with controversy from its very inception. A neutral in the theatre is either a visitor or a moron. There is too much dispute and *cause* for dispute to simply ride the crest of the waves. Today, to speak about acting at all, one must first pry out its true nature from a rubble of fabrication which has been accumulating for centuries. The only way to discuss dramatic art today is to isolate the living cells from the dead ones. To write about the theatre as if contamination did not exist is to do disservice to the living cells.

THE METHOD AS MEANS

★ I ★

The Doers and the Done

THE WORST that can be said of bad acting is that it is widely accepted and enthusiastically approved by a majority of the theatre-going public. It is difficult to even begin to discuss qualitative, genuine acting when laurels are regularly bestowed upon base and fraudulent histrionics.

It is a horrible fact (but somehow less horrible if acknowledged) that most people do not know what good acting is, or to put it more accurately, what good acting feels like. The broad, blatant cliché and the deftest acting stroke are indistinguishable to the average playgoer. The cliché will move him to tears as readily as the "felt" performance; his response to the mediocre mummer will be as demonstrative as that attending the work of an inspired tragedian. Confronted with subtlety, he will complain about lack of clarity. Confronted with crass show and obvious devices, he will praise "theatrical effectiveness". Leaving the theatre, uncertain as to whether he has been moved or bored, he will fish for reactions among his companions and vehemently affirm that opinion which is stated in the most dogmatic terms.

He will revere slapstick and condemn sophisticated comedy because it chooses to play with its pants on. Or he

will dote on sophistication and relegate low comedy to a stratum beneath contempt. If the proper stentorian tone trembles the rafters, he will approve "the classics" and believe he has been uplifted by two hours of protracted ennui. If unmarked by violence and the thunder of rolling "r's," he will dismiss the "long-hair drama" as stuff meant only for the schoolroom. If a play in any way mirrors the minuscule world of his own puttering humanity, he will label it "life-like" and shower it with superlatives. If it deals with the profounder aspects of the human condition, he will, after suppressing his confusion, stigmatise it as "highbrow". If the theatre soothes, cajoles and does not surprise him, he will patronise it and champion it. If it goads, unnerves or confounds him, he will stay away until it has recovered itself.

If the dramatic art was not predicated on truth and enlightenment, the theatre could continue catering to the obtuseness of the average playgoer, but the art owes something to itself, and in paying that debt, the public inadvertently benefits.

* * * *

For over three centuries, audiences have been taught a highly complex language of stock-symbols. It is this language which the majority of playgoers expect to find in the playhouse, and it is this language which the majority of actors and producers unerringly provide. A man who tears his hair or cradles his head is in despair. A man who shifts his eyes from side to side is suspicious. A woman who pops her eyeballs and chews her fingers is afraid. A man who looks longingly into a woman's eyes is in love. A man who stoops his shoulders and ambulates in a series of disjointed oriental shuffles is old. Etcetera! Etcetera! Etcetera! These

clichés have become communicative symbols, and by seeing them performed, an audience unravels the intent of a play. Through this language the play *programmatically* communicates itself; its story is told; its characters revealed. But, because the means of communication employed are static, familiar and merely functional, the play cannot have a unique emotional effect. It can have, and often does have, a *signal* emotional reaction; the tried-and-true stock-symbol always evoking the desired effect. In this way, the theatre becomes a mechanical process of Buzz and Flash. Buzz: the cliché-symbol is transmitted. Flash: the cliché-symbol is received. The transmission varies only in iotas; the reception, to so small a degree it is almost imperceptible.

An actor who masters the language of stock-symbolism is prepared to perform the greatest plays in the dramatic repertoire, and can be guaranteed constant employment. He should, however, be careful not to run afoul of the creative actor for such a meeting can be embarrassing and confusing. Embarrassing to the stock-symbolist who suddenly realises acting is a living, varied art capable of innumerable alterations, and not a series of canned reflexes. Confusing to the audience which, being used to the mild ruffle of the routine technician, must suddenly adjust itself to the revolutionary tremors of the creative artist.

In accepting the stock-symbolism of the theatre, the public automatically accepts the fabricated forms in which this language is couched. These reasonable-facsimiles of acting are so prevalent in England they have almost obliterated the feel of the real thing.

The three inartistic substitutes which most often pass for acting are: Exuberance, Indulgence and Facility.

The first is by far the most prevalent. It is a mode of acting in which personal animation overwhelms all character. It is distinguished by fast tempi and loud sounds. The

outward forms of acting are so energetically propelled that the content cannot bear it; the easel so flooded with colours that it permits no design. Our exuberant actor's performance is marked by a general lack of restraint, and a loose, indiscriminate—often demonic—philanthropy. He is so concerned with projection that he gives away more than he can afford. He believes the way to win an audience is to give unstintingly, as if the measure of acceptance was in some way related to the degree of donation. Such an actor, so intent on giving all, violates the dimensions set by the playwright. He contacts an audience through himself rather than through his role. He neglects taste, distorts perspective and, because of a misguided desire to reach the audience more directly, forfeits his relation to other actors. Exuberance however, is a likeable human trait, and spectators often enjoy watching it. It is only on reflection that they realise, despite the flush and flow, it was all somewhat irrelevant.

The Indulgent actor never quite achieves that necessary balance between Self and Character. Character becomes suffocated by Self. We see only slight flutterings of the playwright's intent behind the panoply of the actor's personal make-up. We glean the meaning of the play only in those fleeting seconds when the text, operating on its own steam, escapes from the stranglehold of the player. The indulgent actor is often the sort who lacks the technical variety needed to express dramatic intent. Everywhere you look, you see *him*. His inability to express tones other than his own results in utter submersion of character. He usually enjoys himself immensely, but because it is at the expense of the play, he loses all sense of the play—except as an object of personal gratification. I am not really referring here to the actor who 'plays himself.' I feel the opprobrium attached to such a criticism is extremely unjustified and testifies to

a shortsightedness in those who bring it. All an actor can play is himself. Himself in the thousand-and-one variations dictated by a thousand-and-one roles. When people denounce a performer for "playing himself" what they are really condemning is his basic shallowness and lack of personal resources. A multi-faceted, substantial actor *plays himself* as relentlessly as does a spare and unendowed one. The resourceful actor, because he has more to draw on, will give the appearance of variety by simply utilising the abundance of his nature. The resourceless actor, unblessed with such abundance, can do no more than exhibit his paucity in half a dozen slightly modified versions. The crime is not acting oneself, but not having enough of oneself to act!

The Facile actor is the journeyman of the theatre. He is in command of a highly polished technical apparatus. By pushing the appropriate button, he can turn on any colour in the emotional spectrum. His voice is good and his bearing adequate. He knows his way about the stage, and can simulate almost any emotion demanded of him. He is not so much a trickster as a man who has found short-cuts; he knows the quickest route to the desired effect, and he takes it. He is often the staple of a production which is devoid of real acting talent, and strangely enough, he is often himself a man of talent. But his talent, unlike that of the creative actor's which is constantly experimenting and growing, is fixed and bounded. It is more a "knack" for theatrical expedition than it is a gift for dramatic invention. As a performer, he is smooth, neat, glib, attractive, self-confident and predictable.

Insufficient as Exuberance, Indulgence and Facility may be, they are unhesitatingly accepted by our now much badgered "average playgoer." He responds to exuberance with a hail-fellow-well-met appreciation for human zest. Being unable to differentiate between the character and the

actor, he equates the two and mistakes indulgence for true involvement in the role. Well-tutored in the banal language of the technician and hopelessly confounded by the appearance of imagination or invention, he is filled with a warm sense of well-being as he watches the facile actor go through his turns. So indoctrinated is he to the ritual of routine theatre that the sudden awareness of wonder, exultation or mystery is inevitably ascribed to indigestion or the peculiar angle of his seat.

* * * *

Proceeding then on the assumption that the art must possess purity no matter how unworthily received, the following must be said:

To the Actor: The success of one's acting will be directly related to the number and variety of pretensions the actor eliminates in himself. Negativism is a positive force in acting theory. An actor rarely learns what to do; he is always learning what not to do. Therefore, the actor must cultivate outspoken and perceptive critics. His director and his own self-awareness must act as a constant Geiger Counter detecting every trace of hollow theatricalism, unfelt emotionalism, and practised mannerism. The apprehension of each acting-cliché must be marked by a public execution; the actor must know what is being destroyed and why. Only then will he be able to replace it with something valid.

To the Spectator, this must be said: Beware of those disguises which seethe beneath the formal masks and trappings of the theatre. Beware of the unreal theatricalism and the untheatrical realism. Beware, when the theatre, using the stock language which comes to it most naturally, begins to explain itself. When you feel it dip a hand into its bag of tricks, revolt! Ask yourself if the theatre is playing *with*

your emotions or *on* your emotions. Don't be content with story-telling. A play is more than the communication of plot-line through expository dialogue. It is knowledge articulated and implied. It is the presence of a world beneath the framework of the play; a sense of ' attitude ' behind the playwright's lines. A true play is a gift. Something to be taken away from the theatre; a thing to call your own. If it is merely a gesture and not a gift, be indignant. If the play be an Indian-giver, only loaning itself to you for two hours, decry it. When you walk into a theatre, expect the most and demand the best. If you are disappointed, shout it from the rooftops.

★ 2 ★

The Splendid Shallows

THE THEATRE, like any other art, succeeds only when it transcends its own form. A play which, during the course of two hours, remains a practised dispensation of premeditated dialogue is as uninteresting as a sonnet which contains three quatrains and a couplet but no poetry. People don't go to the theatre to watch its mechanisms at work; they go in search of truth, beauty, mystery, heroism—all the idealised abstractions to which the art caters.

At one time or another, we all have known the kind of performance which unfolds in a great spray of pyrotechnical brilliance, and yet, through an unaccountable absence, leaves us high and dry after the final curtain. We have also known that other kind of theatre in which, as scenes build one meaningful moment after another, we feel the world of the play insinuate itself into our minds and spirits. Hours afterwards, at a restaurant or sleepless in our beds, we are still caught in the web of the play. At such times, the theatre is more than a 'night's entertainment' for we find ourselves leaving the auditorium perhaps two inches taller or one idea wiser.

When, however, the performance has been a series of brilliant spurts with no genuine foundation, our minds be-

come all the more eager for the after-theatre restaurant; for the meetings with new people and the immersion in new topics. After sitting through a performance marked by the dazzling displays of virtuoso performers, I have often felt this irritating emptiness and I have tried to understand why it was that a production with a dozen or more talented actors, each emoting at the height of his artistic powers, did not possess or overcome me.

One of the reasons, I discovered, was that in productions of this kind, the actors tended to play lines rather than scenes. They were primarily concerned with the colour, variety or music of their speech, and the dramatic basis of the scene served merely as a kind of rostrum for these vocal cadenzas. This was most apparent in the tell-tale little pauses between speeches.

An actor, having heard his cue, would launch into his speech. It would be a bold, resonant, often moving display of histrionics and then it would end. The great soaring bird which had wheeled before me now lay flutterless on the boards. But only for an instant, for before one realised it had fallen, another performer, having heard his cue would swoop it up and once more I would be swayed by the music of speech and the gusto of movement. If theatre was merely a cohesion of a hundred and fifty flamboyant moments, the English stage would represent the height of dramatic artistry. But piece-meal theatre cannot deeply affect. Brilliant virtuoso acting, like brilliant, virtuoso violin-playing, must be intrinsic to the material which gives rise to it. It is only as a result of a logical dramatic sequence that a startling dramatic moment can achieve a true and abiding effect. Isolated effects, no matter how impressive, are doomed to wither in their isolation. The sub-structure of a play, that unwritten foundation that makes pertinent everything manifest upon it, is what really causes empathic response in

an audience. There is a world of difference between a spectator admiring an alien display of histrionics and being caught up in the life-rhythm of a play.

In certain capitals of the world, audiences have been weaned on these erratic displays of vocal fireworks. Plays have become successful precisely because they contain moments set aside for such cadenzas. But do not mistake this kind of appreciation for the unconscious involvement real theatre engenders. These isolated twirls and figure-eights on very thin ice are applauded the way circus feats are applauded. Suddenly the theatre is shorn of all coherent illusion and becomes an arena for performing actors—each with his own specialty. This is a *kind* of theatre just as the carnival tent is a *kind* of theatre, but it has nothing to do with dramatic art nor the interpretation of stage literature.

When you find an audience leaving a theatre discussing the memorable moments of particular performers rather than the circumstances of the play and the ideas it has nurtured, you can be pretty certain its effect was not what it might have been. I can remember leaving a performance of *Death of a Salesman* in New York, hearing a crowd of women hotly debating Willy Loman's marital infidelity, seemingly unaware that the Loman family was a brood conjured up by working actors executing prepared speech and movement in a house whose walls were exposed to the view of thousands of spectators. I can also remember a group of people walking out of a theatre in France (not that France is a particular offender) trying to rationalise their disappointment with the play by complimenting the work of some very famous and competent actors and actresses " So-and-so was very good in Act One . . . and so-and-so was at the top of his form in the last scene!"

How pointless it is to dole out piece-meal praise when the aggregrate result of a performance did not succeed in

creating a believable world for its audience. What does it matter that Gielgud has a rich voice or that Shirley Booth exudes charm; Gielgud will always have a rich voice and Miss Booth will always be charming, but will these performers always succeed in the business of creating and sustaining theatrical illusions? That is the question! To what extent do men and women at work in the acting profession interpret and materialise the texts of writers employing the scenic art. Not, how lovely Mr. Whosit looks in tights, or how adorably Miss Whats-her-name takes a curtain call.

How then can actors who are blessed with rich voices and mobile bodies discover the truth those voices must convey and those bodies import?

Before all else, there must be a common understanding between them. They must recognise the Fraternity of the Play. They must realise that the same conceiving intellect created each one of them and placed them into corresponding positions in the mutual world of the play. And this must be a demonstrative acceptance! A living, active *contact* must exist between them. Their actual and psychological relationship must be so ingrained in their minds that no sooner does one actor step into a scene with another than both automatically assume the attitude demanded by their relationship. It is that instinctive assumption that makes the difference between the actor walking on to a stage upon which three walls have been erected out of canvas, or stepping into a room; of delivering a half-dozen lines of prepared dialogue, or genuinely talking to another person.

This ' contact ' or ' sense of relationship ' may be gained from purely physical acts. Eye contact compels just what the phrase implies. By looking into another actor's eyes and sensing the intent of what he is saying, you are given the living-cue for your next speech. I specify *living*-cue as

opposed to *line*-cue. Having pored over his speeches (usually ignoring the content and significance of all others) the average actor is aware only of his lines and those few cue-phrases which precede them. Consciously or unconsciously he waits for his line-cue then launches into his own bit. By being insensitive to the manner and temperament of the delivered cue, acting often becomes a kind of automatic give-and-take. For a cue, in its truest sense, is a cue *to* action; not a cue *for* words. The living-cue is the spring-board of an actor's speech. It tells him, not only that Actor B has stopped speaking and now Actor A can begin, but also how Actor B feels about what he has said to Actor A and, conversely, how Actor A ought to feel in his reply to Actor B. This may sound ridiculously elemental, but if all the actors in the world who step on stage with only a word-knowledge of their cues were forbidden the right to perform, eighty-five per cent of the profession would be demobilised.

The most impregnable form of intraversion known to psychologic man is that found in the performing actor. He is so concerned with " getting his lines " and " making his moves " that the interpretive part of his performance is often taken for granted. Before he can successfully throw out threads to his fellow-performers, he has first to unwind them from his own spool, and that is engrossing work. It is for the producer, he who stands apart from the active fabrication of the drama, to sense what is lacking. It is for him to make actors conscious of each other, and of the fact that their relationships can be felt by an audience only when they are understood and experienced between themselves. Too often producers are chiefly concerned with " getting the show across " or its concomitant sin " pleasing the paying customers " and so, are busy arranging specific " effects " rather than a general effectiveness. The living

part of any performance is the human communion nurtured between actors during rehearsals. Without that, the most ingenious production-choices are barren; with it, one can afford to forego almost everything else.

No matter how demonstrative audiences may be, and no matter how approvingly short-sighted critics may write, the splendid shallows of structureless performances have little to do with dramatic art. If an actor is a particularly effective virtuoso, the sin will be harder to shake. It is difficult for a performer to dispense with a weakness which is heartily approved by a paying public and praised by producers and critics. But for a serious actor, it is as unconscionable to live on the banks of the splendid shallows as it would be to live on the banks of the River Styx. For it is lonely to play with oneself, and lonelier still to build a theatrical domicile on a foundation of *tours-de-force*. For social reasons, if not for artistic ones, the actor should endeavour to ally himself to the dramatic community created for and by the dramatis personæ.

★ 3 ★

Actors in the Wings

ONE OF the phenomena of the acting profession which continually astounds its practitioners and is almost totally unconsidered by the general public is the incidence of "good nights" and "bad nights."

There is no feeling quite so desolate and disturbing among actors as that attending a "bad night"; a performance which, for several reasons, was under par, dragging, lifeless and uninspired. Conversely, nothing quite equals the airy sense of elation that visits every player—from star to the lowest auxiliary—when the play has experienced a "good night"; a performance charged with creative energy; rolling along at its proper pace; each actor functioning at peak efficiency.

It was this inconsistency in performances which led Stanislavsky to begin his analysis of the art of acting. If only some means could be found, he conjectured, to artificially create the inspiration fickle nature was continually supplying and withdrawing. One of Stanislavsky's great discoveries was that certain exercises helped prepare conditions which were conducive to "inspiration." Through elaborate conscious means he tried to bring about that subconscious acting flow which is always attendant upon great

acting. Modern actors, however, shy away from words such as " inspiration." It is too mystical and ambiguous. Technique, somehow, is a much surer quantity, and so they spend the major part of their professional lives developing their technical equipment oblivious to the fact that an actor's technical facility has pertinence only when realising a *basic emotional current*. It is the quality of this *current* which really makes the difference between a person who is an actor and one who despite his sculptured features and honeydew tones, can never be one.

Most performing artists in music and dance would never contemplate stepping on stage without having warmed up. The opera singer makes sure to arrive at the theatre an hour beforehand in order to get his vocal equipment lubricated. The dancer spends at least thirty minutes before curtain time limbering up the body and accustoming it to movement in space. Musicians, jugglers, acrobats—indeed every performing artist except the actor, creates a kind of inner-sensitivity in himself before confronting his audience. It is because actors are not conditioned to a set pre-performance routine that they often walk on stage organically unprepared to execute their duties.

Let us examine a working-actor. He is in a show which is doing nicely but which is scheduled to close shortly. He knows well that terrible void that sets in when out of work and so he is making desperate efforts to secure something to follow the present booking. He spends his day making the rounds of agents and contacts who have, in the past, found him work. In each office the answer is the same. There is nothing and there is no likelihood of anything in the future. Silent, introspective and a little worried, he slinks into a restaurant for supper. He eats his food sullenly, mentally conducting that painful self-appraisal which all actors come to know. He feels rejected and, in a vague, inexplic-

able way, spurned. He shudders to consider the horrible insecurity of his profession; the odds of ever achieving a substantial success and of sustaining it, if and when it is achieved. His mind wanders to the lot of his schoolmates; some in Hollywood, some doing well in television or radio. Here he is, after so many years, still " making the rounds." It's a rotten business, he concludes, as he makes for the theatre.

At the theatre, he just has time to put on his make-up and get into costume. He doesn't feel like talking to anybody. These other people don't understand him anyway. They're just " entertainers "; he is an " actor." Oh well, one has got to eat.

Make-up applied and costume donned, he creeps over to his post behind the forestage flat and continues to contemplate the sad state of the world, unconsciously waiting for those six or seven words which are his cue to enter. At last the words echo forth: " Here comes Jolly Freddie now!" Jolly Freddie walks on stage and gives the lousiest performance of his career.

No one would expect a dancer who has spent the last five hours before performance hanging on a clothes-hanger to nimbly toddle on stage and perform with brilliance and ease. But an audience does! They don't give a hoot about the clothes-hanger, or about our actor's philosophical dilemma, or death in the family, or sleepless nights, or a cramp in the knee. They have come for entertainment and, as he takes his seat, the tacit undertanding in the spectator's mind is: everything is in order and shortly I will be overwhelmed by the diverse arts of the theatre operating in masterful harmony. He is quite justified in expecting all of that!

Let us assume our sullen, troubled actor walks into the theatre an hour before curtain time. He greets his fellow-

performers. They exchange pleasantries. They discuss last night's performance and how you-know-who upstaged what's-his-name all through the last act. This leads to a general discussion about upstaging, or about you-know-who and whats-his-name. Minds grind into action, voices express opinions, emotions are aroused. There is cursing, laughter, wheedling, mockery, compassion. A group of men and women employed in the acting profession are functioning like the animated, thinking-feeling human beings they are. The warning buzzer sounds; the curtain rises and the actors take the stage. In nine cases out of ten, as a result of this backstage gregariousness, these actors will perform with ease and even brilliance, the residue of their backstage esprit animating them on the stage.

For the human organism works that way. When it is well-oiled and operating smoothly off-stage, it continues in that well-lubricated state on stage. It is as true for actors as it is for anyone else.

Can you remember the days that begin with muttered greetings and a general 8 a.m. pallor which doesn't relent till noon? The sluggish morning ritual, the never-changing bus ride, the automatic helloes and the mechanical return to routine chores. As opposed to the mornings which begin with a gay greeting from the milkman or the loquacious next-door neighbour, which leads to a meeting with a friend on the bus, a plan made for the weekend, a glib joke as you enter your place of business, an animated discussion about last night's movie or next week's date. Slowly and imperceptibly, all your organic juices are set flowing. Your mind becomes alert; you speak briskly, expressing felt thoughts and not involuntary platitudes. A general sense of awareness activates your entire being. It is infectious. A messenger-boy enters the office and you engage him in pleasantries. He responds with a briskness of his own. In a

short time your whole environment is crackling with the high spirits of people at play. And what better preparation for actors and actresses who, in moments' time, must step out of the backstage shadows into the forestage brilliance to create that same state of spiritual play in a higher, precise and more efficacious world.

I do not believe specific warming-up exercises can succeed with actors. A certain amount of deliberate vocalising can be very helpful, but as for planned, physical exercises, I doubt whether working actors would be able to achieve the unanimity required for such work. But what each actor can do, each in his own way, is to perk up his own consciousness by actively relating to someone else; applying himself to a subject of interest; stirring up thoughts and feelings; getting the blood flowing and the brain ticking. Even a superficial gregariousness helps the acting temperament, for what begins as self-induced interest often turns into a sincere exchange of thought and feeling. The important thing is to get the ball rolling. Once this is done, it tends to bounce by itself.

It is this " aliveness," this bristling energy which underlies social intercourse that gives the world of the play its life-blood. For the sprightliness and vigour that goes into backstage badinage are the very same elements which make a scene vital and scintillating. On stage as off, this social by-play is compounded of active human elements. For that reason, and also because backstage liveliness does not wither on stage but assimilates itself into the framework of the play, it is the equivalent of a singer's warm-up and a dancer's limbering. Somehow, such preparation seems more appropriate to the art of acting than mechanical exercises, because it utilises real feelings and real thoughts between human beings. It is the stuff of life and, therefore, the stuff of acting as well.

There is one qualification that should be made. Despite the cliché that all actors are hearty extraverts and irrepressible exhibitionists, there is always that type of actor who brings a dominantly introvert approach to his work; whose recipe for outburst entails a stealthy internal preparation. To such an actor, pre-performance blather is not only distracting but downright odious. An actor with such a temperament usually needs no artificial stimulus, as he is never so detached from his role as to require elaborate reorientations. But such actors are the exceptions, and just as they appear to be set apart from their fellow players, they likewise transcend the whole business of artistic systematization.

★ 4 ★

The Method, the Madness and the Future

PART ONE

EVERY GENERATION seems to have its own theatrical controversy. In the eighteenth century, Diderot's paradox raised blood-pressures over the question of " conscious " as opposed to " unconscious " acting. In the nineteenth century, Irving and Coquelin, employing similar premises, enlarged that debate. Later generations fought tooth and nail over *theatricalism* v. *realism*. In the late forties, Brecht's ' alienation ' theories rattled the complacency of post-war Europe and the reverberations of those doctrines are only now being felt.

The Great Debate of the mid-twentieth century seems to embrace all the others. On one side, the advocates of Method Realism are assembled. Their bastion is the Actors' Studio (*née* Group Theatre); their generals: Kazan, Strasberg, Clurman, Lewis, etc.; their lieutenants: Brando, Malden, Steiger, Gazzara, *et al*; their battle-cry " Live your part." Opposing them is a multifarious army mostly European, bludgeoning off their advances with cries of " Style " —" The Classics "—" Beauty and Imagination." It is doubtful that any acting controversy has ever been more

shot through with fallacies, misconceptions and scant knowledge.

The majority of the Method opponents revile a pair of books entitled: *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* but it often appears that these books have been merely scanned (if that) and, in the majority of cases, misunderstood. (Stanislavsky, for all his pedagogical know-how, was not the most readable of writers, and actors, not the most patient people in the world, cannot be blamed for finding him tedious.)

It is a brave writer indeed who attempts to paraphrase in a sentence or two all Stanislavsky has written, but one cannot begin to discuss deviations and fallacies unless one is generally familiar with basic intentions. And so, briefly then:

Stanislavsky as mentioned was disturbed by the fact that performances varied from one night to the next. Monday a show went beautifully; everyone was on their toes and the result was a balanced, punctilious performance. Tuesday, the bottom dropped out. Everyone plodded uninspiredly through their roles and all cohesion was gone. In order to achieve consistent high quality, Stanislavsky tried to discover a means of sustaining the actor's creative imagination. He hoped, through the use of exercises and other aids, that a subconscious acting flow might develop. His work led him to the study of that most inscrutable of all theatrical phenomena: why is good, good? What makes a truly moving performance? For only after he knew that could he set about trying to duplicate its elements.

Stanislavsky discovered that the really great performers functioned in a realm completely divorced from that of most actors. They seemed to be "away"—hypnotically immersed in their character and the circumstances of the play. He found the absence of cliché peculiar to all of

them. They had their own personal ways of interpreting emotion. They had forsaken the familiar signs and signals of stock-acting, those well-worn mannerisms which indicated intent to an audience but never moved them. The original Method actors (who existed before the Method did) were people such as Duse, Salvini, Shchepkin and Talma. Stanislavsky was not interested in Method actors; he was interested in great actors and in what made them great.

After studying the traits of the great actors of his day, Stanislavsky set about trying to codify what was peculiar to all of them. In so doing, he hoped to discover a means of systematically creating the conditions which bring about inspiration.

Stanislavsky's great discovery (and it was the greatest discovery of his century) was that the most impressive thing in the theatre was truthfulness and the least impressive was sham. With this fundamental precept, he began a Russian revolution which, like its political counterpart, has been insinuating itself into other countries ever since. The object then was better theatre through a distillation of artifice and superficiality and the introduction of (felt) acting.

Outside of his own country, Stanislavsky's work had its greatest effect in America. In the thirties, the social-orientated Group Theatre sent emissaries to Russia to see " just how the thing was done." After absorbing Stanislavsky's basic ideas, Group alumni such as Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg and Harold Clurman, evolved their own versions of these precepts and began to apply them to the American drama. The Method (as opposed to the Stanislavsky System) is the modern result of this eclecticism.

It is purely accidental that the Method should be associated with the modern colloquial plays of Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Doubtless a realistic

acting-style is particularly suited to these plays but it should be remembered that this was a local application of an acting-theory whose malleability and immense range is as yet not fully tested. Remember, Stanislavsky was not working merely with Gorki, Gogol and Chekhov. He had tried his hand at Shakespeare, Molière, Maeterlinck and other non-naturalistic writers. He made no distinction between plays susceptible to Method application and those unsusceptible to it. Nevertheless, the idea has emerged that the Method is an approach relevant only to slangy, slouchy, sexy plays of modern life, preferably featuring homosexual themes and characterised by armpit-scratching, navel-picking and a mumbling inarticulateness. All of which attests to a deplorable blindness concerning the art of acting. For it assumes that one level of emotional activity is distinct from all others, and that acting is a departmentalised art with unencroachable boundaries. Whereas the truth of the matter is that acting, as an art and as an instinct, is exactly the same in all cases. No matter what the form of play or style of playing, it is always body, voice, mind and temperament applying itself to the written word. Though that word be iambic or colloquial, the instrument which takes it up always has two eyes, two ears, a nose and a mouth.

The exponents of Method acting have a great advantage in this twentieth century Great Debate, insomuch as their views can be expressed in positive terms. If the Method is nothing else, it is a series of clearly delineated principles and precepts, easily quotable and consistent within itself. How difficult it is for non-Method advocates (the term itself is a kind of impossibility) to effectively refute their nemesis. They rely on a passionate but unqualified negativism. They know what they don't like, but cannot easily explain what they would substitute. The clichés of such disputes have become legend. "Nobody wants utter realism! People go

to the theatre for art, not to see real life! The Method can't grapple with plays of style; with classics; with works of imagination!!!" etc., etc. It becomes a little wearisome to explain that the works of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Clifford Odets as theatricalised by Method directors such as Kazan and Clurman, are not products of utter man-in-the-street realism, but of an artistic realism touching, in certain scenes by Miller and Williams, even a kind of poetic frame. As to the Method's inability to grapple with the classics and more stylized plays, only this can be said: The success of the contemporary realistic plays staged by the Americans represents the first rung of Method accomplishment. The other directors who will succeed in dusting the cobwebs out of Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and a whole slate of stylistic theatre literature both ancient and modern, are yet to come. America has been the first foreign country to achieve striking results with the Method. Naturally, those results were achieved with the tart, realistic plays which constitute the genius of the American theatre. In other countries and at other times, other theatrical forms will be reanimated by the teachings of Stanislavsky.

But, to return to the critics of the Method: I will make so bold as to say, the reason they cannot couch their arguments in more positive terms is because all of their objections are reconcilable within the broad framework of the Stanislavsky System. The shattering fact is that the Stanislavsky System is the very "system" of all acting. It is as impossible to be opposed to the precepts of Stanislavsky as it is to be opposed to the natural law of gravity. For every actor, even those totally oblivious of the Moscow Art Theatre and its work, achieves results traceable to the Stanislavsky System. Each time an actor is performing with credibility and without recourse to cliché, motivated from within and unshakeably involved in his role, he is practis-

ing the Method and affirming the precepts of Constantin Stanislavsky. Method actors, as has been pointed out, existed before Stanislavsky ever put pen to paper. Because the Method is not an invention or a modern discovery, it is simply an articulation of truths which have existed for centuries. Whenever such truths are wrenched from the chaos of universal experience and articulated, the effect is always one of revelation.* Stanislavsky's greatness is not that he created truths, but that he unmasked fraudulence and, in so doing, exposed the reality which always hides beneath it.

* * * *

Although the Method and Stanislavsky System are used interchangeably in modern parlance, there is a distinction to be drawn between them, and this distinction becomes strikingly evident when one compares an American production by a Kazan or a Lewis with a M.A.T. production by a man like Viktor Stanitsin.

The difference is mainly the result of this later eclecticism. The System was the product of Stanislavsky alone; his personality dominates its history and its terminology. The studios in New York. Once the Group Theatre came to Method started to modify Stanislavsky's basic theories as early as 1923 when Richard Boleslavsky and Leo Bulgakov, both members af the original Moscow Art Theatre, set up

* Although Stanislavsky was the first to admit he was not an innovator but simply a chronicler of artistic data, the tendency to belittle his original accomplishments is often yielded to. The process of breaking down a play into "units and objectives" originated with Stanislavsky, as did the concept of sense and emotion-memory. It was he who impressed actors with the relevance of action in a play, and the need to 'perform tasks' in order to achieve truthfulness and avoid the facile cliché. Improvisation, though traditionally associated with the *Commedia del Arte,* was in a sense, rediscovered by Stanislavsky who used it as a means of deepening the understanding of character and creating the reality of fictional circumstances.

studios in New York. Once the Group Theatre came to grips with the import, the intellect of Lee Strasberg overshadowed that of Stanislavsky.

Strasberg is a twentieth century American, grounded in Freud and practising the belief that the more scientific one's approach is to acting the more successful it will be as an art. Being one of the three major architects of the Group Theatre and the one most concerned with the actual teaching of acting, Strasberg's influence eventually pervaded the whole of the American theatre. Under Lee Strasberg, the System slowly metamorphosed into the Method. It bebecame more psychologically insistent, more emphatic about subjective truth, and more exploratory than it had ever been. But beside ramifications there was also a departure and a very serious one.

When Strasberg taught the members of the Group Theatre, he was to a large extent duplicating the work of Stanislavsky. He was applying general acting principles to the individual members of an acting company in order to achieve group results. This is precisely what Stanislavsky had done with the Moscow Art Theatre, and Meyerhold and Vakhtangov with their respective studios. But once the Group disbanded, Strasberg continued his teaching practice, most notably at the Actors' Studio (circa 1947). Here, however, the whole basis of the training was altered. It was no longer a matter of developing a fixed number of permanent performers in order to achieve an ensemble skill. There was no longer an ensemble! In place of a fixed company, there were hundreds of professional Broadway actors; some *in* work, some *out* of work, attending classes one week, deployed to jobs the next. It was no longer a question of trying to fuse a quantity into an entity; it was simply scene-study and acting exercise. It became, to a very dangerous extent, practice for its own sake.

Once a situation like this arises, the nature of the training becomes slightly eccentric. Eccentric because it exists in isolation from the practical work of a group-theatre, i.e., putting on shows with a more or less fixed quantity. The process then becomes one of *turning out* Method actors; a process which, considered historically, is a reversal of Method aims. The Method is not a weird form of artistic alchemy by which a drab actor can be dipped in a vat and emerge a glittering talent. It is a discipline whereby a coalition of permanent players develop a group quality and perfect a communal acting-instrument: the Company. In the past, when the Method has succeeded, it has perfected just such an instrument; in the early 1900s under Stanislavsky; in the Third Studio under Vakhtangov; at the Vieux-Colombier under Jacques Coupeau; in the Group Theatre under Strasberg and Clurman; at London's Theatre Workshop under Joan Littlewood. To apply Method to individuals isolated from a company is to set four wheels under one plank of a wagon instead of distributing them equally under each side. It is an attempt to personify in one what, ideally, should be exemplified in many. It certainly can succeed in sharpening individual talents; any form of regular instruction can do this. But its original purpose and its natural bent is towards the development of an ensemble. When Strasberg shifted his energies from the theatre to the workshop, he exposed himself to the dangers of insularity.

As a result of abuses in New York (about which Strasberg could do nothing) the Method converted into a kind of self-therapy in which the emotional-recall exercise was the most popular treatment. Its advocates began to adopt the incidental results of the training (naturalistic behaviour) without experiencing the process which was supposed to bring them about. To be a Method actor then (i.e., to be in the fashion) one had only to manifest recognisable symptoms.

From this, symptoms developed a pertinence of their own and because they were obviously imposed, the whole Method approach stirred up a violent antagonism. Which was quite understandable. Falsity under the banner of Truth and Inner Feeling is the most intolerable of pretensions. The Method became an eccentricity to be paraded, or an occult secret whose public mockery conveyed a sweet sense of martyrdom. The clannishness of the Actors' Studio and its subsequent immersion in publicity made the whole business more suspect still. But what is important to note about the ballyhoo is this: while the publicity-seekers were making the feature pages of the more impressionable dailies, the serious students of acting in New York and elsewhere were still working with the substance of the theories. While Joe Smith was imitating a tea kettle for the *Daily Mirror* John Jones was utilising the same exercise to stretch his imagination. While a small number of clowns were chewing marbles and calling it acting, a larger number were putting themselves through rigorous analysis in order to express something genuine in their nature.

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It is not generally recognised in England, but the Method in America is the fluid property of about fifty able teachers. In New York alone, Uta Hagen, Herbert Berghoff, Miriam Goldina, Michael Howard, Brett Warren, Paul Curtiss and others place their own personal construction upon general theory and so produce something slightly different from each other.

This is beneficial and inevitable. In practice, the Method is nothing more than a personal perception applied to the art of acting; the more perceptive and sensitive the teachers, the more value accrues to the student. The danger,

and it is a great danger, is for a man to start up shop on the basis of the books alone. Since the Method is, first and foremost, an experience, it cannot be successfully conveyed by a person who does not have a *sensory* awarness of what it is all about. Like religion, it is only the ones who have themselves seen the light who can open the eyes of the others.

★ 5 ★

The Method, the Madness and the Future

PART TWO

Acting is the art of Self; the supreme revealment of Self. On stage, it is Self which feeds the actor and Self which is fed upon. Self, in its multifarious versions from Burbage to Olivier, has always been the great draw in the theatre.

But most actors believe that acting demands the assumption of a kind of non-Self; an Acting-Self as it were; an artistic substitute for the real self. But no actor can completely forsake Self while performing, and the actor who places the greatest distance between Self and his role is the one who depends most upon borrowed devices and facile imitation. Not having *his* self to draw upon, he draws upon the selves of others.

The spectator is never interested in Joe Doakes simulating the ferocity of Laurence Olivier or the nonchalance of Marlon Brando. Why should he concern himself with reasonable facsimiles when the originals are so easily available? What the spectator *is* interested in whether he realises it or not) is *Joe Doakes'* ferocity and *Joe Doakes'* nonchalance. In fact, in all of Joe Doakes' peculiar changes of mood. He wants to see how Joe Doakes gets angry; how Joe Doakes cries, laughs, falls in love, is spurned, defeated

or elated. For Joe Doakes' passion—removed as it is from the passion of Olivier or Brando—possesses the uniqueness of Joe Doakes, and in that neither Olivier nor Brando nor anyone else can match him. When character is conditioned, nourished and animated by Self, what happens on the stage has a dazzling glare of truth about it.

The Method is the first articulated appreciation of this fact. In a spirit of democracy which seems out of place in acting discourse, it takes for granted the dramatic worth of the individual actor. It encourages the expression of emotional colour which can come from nowhere else but the spectrum of that actor's personal make-up. It is a theory based on the conviction that people are more interesting than types, and truth more compelling than fraud—no matter how spectacular that fraud may be.

* * * *

An actor can be known in a way that the ordinary man can never be known.

Through the years, the public watches the actor's display; sees him in a variety of roles; experiences the feel of his various emotions; comes to expect those mannerisms with which he unwittingly embroiders his acting. No man, no matter how well disguised, can present himself to the probing eyes of thousands of watchers and remain concealed. Granting then that an audience sees behind the thickest mask, it becomes imperative that behind the grease-paint there should be a human being worthy of scrutiny.

The Method encourages the actor to approach a role as if it were an invitation to reveal himself; the role becomes a kind of wonderful vessel especially created for the kind of life he will fill it with. It was in just such a frame of mind

that John Barrymore approached the role of Hamlet. "I played it as if it had been especially written for me," he told his daughter. In discussing their art, the greatest actors have said much the same thing in different words. But actors who lack Self will, after giving all, wonder why they did not succeed in creating something artistic. The answer is that the theatre is as harshly revealing as psychoanalysis. The act of acting is the ultimate exposure. An actor is in the constant state of revealing his true character, and so he must suffer the consequences of his paucity just as he reaps the rewards of his abundance.

* * * *

The greatest hazard of all acting is Consciousness. Beginning with the consciousness of self, it proceeds to register the presence of the auditorium, the public, the set, the lights—all the tangibles which insist upon being overlooked so that they can function properly. From this general consciousness of the real situation (theatre, audience, play, etc.) the actor becomes stricken with the demands of that situation. His mind tells him that a quantity of listening-watching people have purchased tickets in order to be entertained, and although this is incontestable, the actor irrationally believes that it is his sole responsibility to entertain them. For the moment, he forgets the presence of the play, the production prepared during the rehearsal-period and the contributions of his fellow-players. He visualises only himself, the stage and the desires of the audience. He then becomes aware that he is operating within a fictional context, the play, and that this is his only instrument for gratifying the watchers. His fear deludes him into believing the audience is not grasping the significance of the material and that he is obliged to make it clearer or more entertaining; to under-

line it; to give it more energy, more vigour, more clarity and more punch. But because the motivation for this increased effort comes from without (the imaginary wants of the audience) and not from within (the requirements of the text), the result is a distortion or an extravagance, an excess or an inaccuracy.

As a result of what can only be called temporary insanity, the acting assumes an identity of its own and desperately tries to unhinge itself from the stage and move among the audience. Once the actor's feeling succeeds in escaping from the clutches of the stage, the play naturally expires. A play, like a person, cannot live without this feeling; it is, after all, the life-breath of the drama.

The root of all this disorder is Consciousness. How then can actors, in order to avoid this fatal consciousness, keep themselves engrossed in the world of the play?

The Method suggests that one way of avoiding this is to occupy the actor. If a man's mind and body is fully occupied, it is reasonable to conclude he will not be easily diverted by outside influences. In order to occupy the actor, the Method proposes that he perform a job. Not *any* job, but the job indicated in the play. If a character is supposed to escape from a room where he is being held, it advises the actor to occupy himself with the task of escaping from that room. And since the playwright has provided a particular room and a set of particular reasons for wanting to escape from that room, the actor's task is simplified. *He must try to escape from the room for the given reasons.* He must not pretend to try, or deliver the writer's words while the director's ingenuity manœuvres him out of the room—he must engross himself in escaping from the room—at the same time integrating all the dramatic circumstances which occasion the desire and its fulfilment.

Playing the Objective, one of the basic tenets of the

Method, ensures a particular involvement. It employs the actor; gives him something to concentrate on and something to do. Consequently, the temptation to *act in general* (to pretend to leave the room) is reduced. And there is a very real likelihood of a *particular* feeling being engendered; particular because it conveys the whys and wherefores of a specific character enmeshed in a set of specific circumstances. It is this *particularisation* in the drama which interests the spectator in the happenings on the stage. For he is not being asked to imagine *any* character in a *general* context *somewhat like* the one suggested on the stage, but a *particular* character in a *particular* context, acting for these *particular* reasons.

Just as this involvement provides a focal-point for the actor's energies avoiding a fatal consciousness, it furnishes a vital frame of reference for the spectator, whose consciousness on the other side of the footlights is just as disastrous in the theatre. The premise then is this: if the actor is engrossed, the action becomes credible and its effect truthful; and the appearance of truth—on the stage or anywhere else—serves to capture the mind and eye of the spectator. Once this intensity of attention is achieved, there are no limits to what the drama can perform.

* * * *

The Method has brought a palpable reality to an art-form, which from its earliest origins presumed to be life-like but during the course of its development got bogged down in its own conventions. Through the years, the theatre, kowtowing to popular taste and indiscriminate audiences, yielded to exaggeration and showy externalism. The Method has demonstrated that acting, in order to be effective, need not be as tall as the Alps or as loud as a Wag-

nerian overture. In restoring truth to the art of acting, it has rendered an inestimable service to dramatic writing, and particularly to the realistic drama.

But it has now begun to overstress the virtues which originally made it notable. The American theatre (films, TV included) has pushed capital R—Realism as far as it can possibly go. In bursting its bounds realism is shifting toward a mode of theatrical expression which, ironically, possesses qualities similar to those the Method helped to rout. This Next Theatre will not be a theatre of non-realism; if anything it will embody an ultra-realism, but its emphasis will no longer be social. This Next Theatre is already implied in the works of the brothers Capek, Andreyev, Saroyan, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. It is a theatre which swells realism to a giant simulacrum of itself; a theatre in which the particular is so inextricably wedded to the universal that one never speaks without echoing the other. In such a theatre, the accuracy of gesture and dialect will mean very little, for actors will be called upon not to represent a particular human being in a specific social circumstance, but to portray a viewpoint or a general conception of character in the widest variety of circumstances.

The modern playwrights are utilising a frame of reference larger than those of the 'popular' playwrights whose works still clog the leading theatres of Paris, London and New York. Ionesco's world stretches beyond Montmartre or the Bronx. When Beckett places a tramp on stage, he gives us the universe in rags. When Genet presents us with a convict, he is portraying the essential criminality of modern man. When Brecht puts a soldier before the footlights, it is not to illustrate the aberrations of a shell-shocked veteran, but to show us the soul of armies and the anatomy of war.

Plays are being written which call for actors to hit notes that were never thought to be in the human range. The old text-book theories are useless in the face of them. The changing nature of modern playwriting is forcing actors to forsake the facile methods of imitation and duplication with which the theatre has satisfied itself for over three centuries. The Brechtian actor of today has got to unlearn ninety-five per cent of what every drama school teaches. The Ionesconian performer has got to start from scratch.

If an actor truly wants to learn his craft, he must be tutored by the playwright. As the musician learns atonalism from the composer's score which compels him to produce it, so the actor will discover the Next Theatre by expressing the intent contained in the playwright's script. In this way actors are always in the vanguard of society. They are constantly showing us the new and unfamiliar. Today's actor, more so than ever before. It is no longer enough for an actor to be taught speech and movement. He has got to be taught to think according to the twentieth century; to move in the tempo of his time.

In the chapter on Hi-Style, I shall try to probe the attitudes behind this new drama and the style it demands of the actor.

★ 6 ★

The Character of Characters

THEATRICAL HISTORIANS tell us that in the early days of the theatre there was no director as we have come to know him. There was a sort of artistic-foreman who may have devised moves and suggested intonations, but as for a person with a clear-cut conception of the whole and a means of realising it on stage, he just did not exist.

But as we examine the development of theatre, we find its progress inextricably linked with the emergence of the director. We know that Molière, in addition to writing and acting his plays, did wield some form of theatrical supervision. (His " Impromptu de Versaille " is full of directorial sagacity.) It is believed among Elizabethan scholars that there was a certain form of directorship in Shakespeare's theatre even if the Bard himself didn't thump the prompt-book. (The similes and metaphors in at least half a dozen plays reflect Shakespeare's preoccupation with stage parlance and its symbolic relation to life.) We know for certain that the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (whose ensemble-playing stunned Stanislavsky) was a severe task-master and could well be considered the grand-daddy of all director-autocrats. The growth of the French theatre in the twentieth century (after Antoine) is generally attributed to the direc-

torial architecture of Jacques Coupeau (he, of the *Vieux Colombier*) and Charles Dullin (who, beside his own work with the Atelier did much to revivify the *Comédie Française*). It is quite impossible to discuss modern European theatre without taking into account the contributions of such directors as Otto Brahm, Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Louis Jouvet, Jean Vilar and Jean-Louis Barrault.

From a position of almost total obscurity, the director (producer, regisseur, metteur-en-scene, what-you-will) has assumed a position of unparalleled importance. Indeed, today in America, it is a Director's Theatre.

This predominance is no accident. Through the centuries, theatricians have come to realise that a production is a director's creation almost to the same degree that a mural is a painter's, or a novel an author's. Although the general public is still unaware of the director's function or the power he exerts, actors and actresses concede him every right. They have come to realise that the success or failure, cohesion or disjunction of any production is largely determined by that verbose individual in shirt-sleeves who shouts instructions at them from different corners of an empty house. From a practical standpoint, that is the only recognition a director needs.

And yet, no production ends without some actor or actress venting his or her animosity towards the arbitrary, stupid and fatuous man who spent three frantic weeks piecing together the delicate elements of the drama. Invariably. There is a heated discussion concerning the director's province as opposed to the actor's province. Also invariably (since actors always outnumber directors) there results a general agreement that the director doesn't know his crêpe from his putty and it's a damn good thing the show is closing.

Elsewhere in this collection, the subject of the actor's introversion has been alluded to. It should be noted here that it is a *denied* introversion. Few actors will admit that while performing (and especially while rehearsing) they cannot see the forest for the trees. It is not uncommon for a worker to be involved with his task to the exclusion of almost everything else, even the ultimate purpose of that task. The story goes that an inquisitive fellow in Egypt stopped by a construction gang and asked a bricklayer what he was doing. " I'm laying bricks," was the reply of the worker, who resented obvious questions. The same question was put to half a dozen bricklayers and in each case the answer was the same: " I'm laying bricks." The question was then directed to the last man in the gang. When asked what he was doing, he replied: " I'm building a temple."

The majority of actors during the rehearsal-period are concerned with bricklaying. Those that vaguely perceive they are building a temple are too involved with their bricklaying to clearly visualise that temple. It takes a goodly share of concentration to effectively lay bricks; to go at a temple straight away calls for more than most actors can summon. And yet (to pursue this analogy to its bloody end) it is, in fact, a temple which is being built. And the man who knows this above all knowledge of bricklaying is the director.

At the theatre, we are most noticeably exposed to the actor's art and the writer's art. We see actors perform, and we hear the words a playwright has written. And yet, if we experience a play to any degree at all, it is the director's art we are responding to. For a director brings a conception to a conception. More than anyone else, it is he who determines what an audience will carry away from the theatre. It is because he *does* master-mind the workings of the theatre

that actors must afford him their absolute trust. And it is because many actors do not realise the importance of his contribution that such trust is often withheld.

Even if an actor could gauge the effect of his own performance, he could never gauge its effect in relation to all other performances; in relation to the preceding scene and the scene to follow, nor its general effect on the Whole. Although he may have strong feelings about his particular interpretation, can he justify these feelings in the context of the whole play without ever seeing them in that context? One of the greatest bugaboos in the theatre (and one of a director's stickiest peeves) is the actor's protestation: "It doesn't *feel* right!" Anything and everything in the theatre can, for innumerable reasons, *not feel right.* If a speech is inherently unmotivatable, no director in the world can invest it with a ring of truth. But it is often an actor's task to invent motivations where they are not apparent. That is one condition of the actor's art—to produce reasons for actions and justifications for words. If none can be found that's an end to it, but there is a difference between *illogical* stage action and *uncomfortable* stage action. There is no remedy for the former; its fault is rooted in the play. But the subtlety of the actor's art should be able to facilitate the latter. The investiture of truth upon a series of circumstances not really true is the basic premise of acting. In practice this means the actor must be constantly supplementing and, if need be, correcting the writer's work. The insertion of suitable motivations can be one of the actor's most arduous tasks.

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Although the British designation *Producer,* and the American title *Director* are often used interchangeably,

there is a very marked difference in their function, and the words themselves contain the key of this difference.

The word *Producer* seems to infer tangibilities; a physical cohesion of elements in order to *produce* a tangible production. And as production can either refer to the work of the producer or the physical components of the play itself, the inference is strengthened. *Director* on the other hand seems to suggest less of a material involvement. Quite apart from stage-parlance, a director is one who regulates the work of others or indicates a *direction* for them to follow. Even the noun *direction*, when referring to the play as a whole, has a positively verbal feel to it—suggesting an active influence rather than, as with *production*, the installation of a stage-product. The connotative difference between the two words seems to lie with the absence or presence of tangibility.

The reason for all this etymological hair-splitting is that the basic differences between the British producer and, say, the Method director, bears out the implications of their titles. The *producer* is more concerned with the effective arrangement of production-tangibles than his American counterpart, who tends to involve himself with the active human elements.

A Method director approaches an actor as if he were an unmined natural resource. During rehearsals his excavations into that actor's sensibility are profound and relentless. In order to achieve his goal of ' true feeeling,' he finds it necessary to explore the subterranean depths of an actor's being, cutting away flim-flam and external coating as he descends.

The British producer is content to arrange the flim-flam and put a new layer of paint on that external coating. He has less patience (and usually less time) and so his entire approach is more expeditious. After the first readings, he begins to expect acting which is almost up to performance

level. He is content to receive the various contributions of his cast and arrange them within the pattern of his production as one would a floral design. He assumes the actor knows his business and has his own ideas about interpretation and, unless they are radically opposed to his own, he permits them to assert themselves. His respect for the actor is so great that he often sits on the sidelines as a sort of official observer, while the cast potters about with the ingredients of the drama. Occasionally he inserts a helpful technical comment or suggests a piece of business.

The Method director is constantly occupied with character. He is always testing motivations and trying to assess the validity of moves and gestures. He is wholly immersed in the world of the play—always looking at things from the viewpoint of the dramatis personæ. The British producer is invariably outside the world of the play; a fount of practical experience standing before the proscenium arch deciding what will fill the gap most suitably. The British producer's rehearsal notes are chock-full of vocal suggestions ("Put the emphasis on '*turkey*,' darling, not on 'trot'!") and cold stage directions ("Cross up, gesture with your left hand, wink your left eye, then slump to the ground, right leg before left"). By shaping the external design of a performance, the British producer believes he can successfully realise the internal content of the play. The Method director believes that true performance starts from the inside and gradually bores itself out to the light of day.

For these reasons, a British producer is very often as good as his cast, his overall efficacy being determined by the quality of individual performers. While the Method director doesn't belittle individual accomplishments, he is bent on an ensemble result and in the process alters, heightens, deepens and, if he is lucky, elevates the work of every member of his cast.

The implication in this admittedly one-sided comparison is that the work of the Method director will always be superior to his trans-Atlantic counterpart, but this is not the case. There is a kind of production whose very genius lies in the fact that it is overt; its intentions are fully realised in its outward form. *Titus Andronicus* is such a play; *Danton's Death* is another. Here the flash of its physical presence conveys the sum total of its identity. Works of this nature lend themselves to the essentially concrete language of the British stage.

If I am being interpreted as saying that a British producer works successfully only when his play is essentially external, I must hasten to qualify the usual concept of Externalism. A shallow play may be called external because it ends with its skin. But a play with substance can also be called dominantly external when its form is more striking than its content. With such works, the treatment is all. The English production of *Under Milk Wood* is a good example of a play in which the concrete possessed more significance than the interior drive which fashioned it, and yet it could not have been called external in an invidious sense. It was a work in which sprightly little episodes, sparked with a straight-from-the-shoulder poetry, created a series of lucid theatre-images. It was the episodic structure plus the capering verse plus the frequency and variety of scene-changes which made this production so effective. Character, in the Method sense, was merely *indicated*, and yet this didn't rankle us. Credibility was a matter of stock characterisations invigorated by verse and played with a deliberate gusto which seemed perfectly appropriate in the surroundings. It was as if the truth of this work was wall-papered on its outsides, and because it was, we didn't beckon after deeper implications.

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Probably as a result of centuries of British *production,* English actors believe a director exists only as a sort of optional guide and sometime-counsellor—useful in suggesting moves and regulating the volume of sound directed at the audience. But a producer's real impact must come from his cast and not from his equipment. Since it is living material with which he is working, it is living material he must try to animate. The current of his conception of the play must direct the flow of every line and movement. He is not there only to beat time (although he must do this too) but to regulate the emotional shadings of every beat. Which is not to imply that he must *direct* every beat. There is nothing more outrageous than a director who comes to rehearsal with an inflexible plan, then tries to mould the performance into its image. To such a director, a cast is so much inanimate matter. He considers the imagination and intellect of actors extraneous. He regards every original suggestion as a threat to the fulfilment of his master-plan and so discourages collaboration. Such a director violates the social ethics of theatre. He ignores the basic understanding that a play is produced by the concerted efforts of men and women united by a common artistic purpose. The director who demands that his actors be parrots and his production an unwavering facsimile of his preconception, is a degenerative force in the theatre, and actors and actresses do right in resisting his persuasion.

But a director must *be* a force. He must exude an intellectual climate and subtly direct the thinking of every performer. If he is content with merely polishing externals, attending to technicalities and assimilating whatever his actors deign to give him, the result of his labours will be curiously characterless. Productions which suffer from this directorial lack of control automatically fall back upon natural resources—the skills and attributes of individual

performers. This may seem to carry the day, but it never provides memorable theatre. Because the stage is the most fluid of the arts and always capable of sudden improvisation, it can bumble through to an end without *conspicuously* failing. All actors, at one time or another, have experienced that demonic reliance on technical continuity. No matter that subtleties are lost and credibility violated, if lines are not glaringly muffed and the curtain comes down when it is supposed to, there is an external order over the performance which is a source of relief to actors. It relieves the audience too, but spectators do not congregate in order to witness faultless technical continuity. Although physical failures are more noticeable than internal dramatic shortcomings, the effect of the latter is much deeper, and it is *that* void which audiences remember long after they have forgotten the spotlight that blew or the sound-cue that was late.

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The modern director's aim is to be as unobtrusive as possible. Which doesn't mean a lack of active control but simply that one's ideas are insinuated instead of imposed. This approach assumes an actor will best realise on stage those ideas which are his own or which, through a subtle autosuggestion, can be made to seem his own. By sprinkling pregnant seeds of thought into an actor's mind and slyly directing his will towards character-objectives, something fresh emerges in performance. It would seem at first that the director acts merely as midwife in this operation, but once the child is born it bears the unmistakable likeness of the man who delivered it.

Which does not by any means preclude all other methods of theatrical propagation. No matter what ethical objec-

tions one lodged against the director-autocrat, his results often possessed a dynamism conspicuously absent from modern theatre. In judging directorial autocracy, the distinction to be made is between the knowledgeable, imaginative and brilliant autocrat, and the director who simply uses the theatre to indulge his ego. Usually, where strict authoritarian rule is coupled with inner integrity and a real skill with the theatre's instruments, actors and actresses willingly submit to despotism. The complaints arise only when the autocrat turns out to be a sophist in disguise.

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Ideally, the director is the hidden intelligence behind a play which gives all the characters a *character,* and all the action a world in which to unfold. He should be constantly consulted not only to facilitate technical continuity but to explain the significance of every movement which is in doubt. He should assign the emotional material he must eventually edit and always keep a private line open to the playwright's intent. Above all, he should know precisely what he wants, and in so knowing, every actor under him will be properly deployed.

★ 7 ★

The Rehearsal Process

ONE OF the most frequently-quoted similes in the theatre compares the rehearsal-period of a play to the birth of a child. Although this may suggest the intensity of a director's attachment to his production, it is still very misleading.

Biological nascence implies the gradual development of an entity from something germinal to something life-size. It also implies a dark, mysterious evolution, the outcome of which (will it have blue eyes or green eyes? Will it look like mummy, daddy or the iceman?) is a surprise to all concerned. I submit, a play, even on the first day of rehearsal, is much more of a known quantity. One has read the script, analysed the characters, followed the action, and gleaned the underlying theme of the work and what it intends. After the first few readings, one has a general idea of the mood and a more or less specific idea (if one is an actor) of what one wants from a character standpoint, and (if one is a director) what one wants from a production standpoint. The vision of the finished product looms mirage-like in the mind. The job then becomes to materialise that mirage. The labour pains of rehearsal are not so much of new growth as they are of recapturing in finite

terms the mental image with which one has set out. The actual development is not a progressive swelling of the artistic ideal into reality, but the erratic arrivals and departures, decisions and reversals, gratifications and defeats which mark the emergence of the full-scale production.

Let me begin discussion of the rehearsal process by registering an intense opposition to the three- and four-week rehearsal period prevalent in the modern theatre.

At a meeting of the New York Drama Desk, a group of American critics were astonished to hear Louis Jouvet confess he rehearsed his production of *Ecoles des Femmes* for six months. It is not uncommon for the Berliner Ensemble to spend eight months in rehearsal, and at the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky once rehearsed a production for eleven months and then deciding it was not fit to be staged, cancelled it.

All of this will appear to be lunatic behaviour to the commercial producer but then, to the hack the genuine artist always appears to be a "queer bird." It is quite true that a play can be memorised and blocked in four weeks' time (this can also be accomplished in five days' time) but the production of a play does not represent the memorisation of its dialogue and the fixation of its action. These are only the bare essentials of drama. Before an actor even nods in the direction of the play, the words have been provided by the playwright—and so the first contribution is made. The actual blocking of movement, one of the producer's initial contributions, is made within the first week. What then, we must ask, does the actor's contribution consist of? Surely not only the memorisation of lines and movement for if so, why rehearse any play longer than five days?

The actor's contribution is the most delicate and

difficult of all. He must animate three things: the work of the writer, the work of the producer and his own work.

More than anything else, the rehearsal period is a time for psychological development. During this period, the life and world of the character insinuates itself into the actor's mind and seeps out through the pores of his performance. He learns, as if through osmosis, the temperament of the person he is playing; the manner of his actions; the texture of his mind. Because he is exposed to the climate of the play for a given length of time, the subtleties of text and subtext are gradually revealed to him. The longer the exposure, the more is revealed. A four-week exposure is insufficient because within that period the actor is also occupied with the external technicalities of play-production. I do not mean to belittle the importance of these technicalities but their absorption should not be crowded into that same period during which the actor is grappling with the very stuff and substance of his role.

If four weeks' rehearsal time is insufficient, one or two weeks is suicidal, and yet that is all the time permitted by the majority of summer stock companies in America and repertory companies in England. Consequently, the lowest ebb in American theatre is to be found on the summer circuit, and the most flagrant examples of British incompetence in the provincial rep playhouses. The horrible fact about both these barren regions of undramatic art is that the former is the training-ground for the majority of American actors and actresses, and the latter, the chief ambition of the innocent British theatrical aspirant. (In England the sin is not only condoned but catered to. Many drama schools hold courses in repertory practice during which actors are conditioned to the insensitive, vilely expeditious ritual of one-week rehearsals and one-week pro-

duction.) The sanctity in which the four-week rehearsal period is held in America is best illustrated by the fact that Orson Welles had to secure special permission from Actors' Equity in order to rehearse his production of *King Lear* six weeks instead of the usual four. Forty-two days for the play which Lamb claimed could not fit into a theatre, and of which Tennyson wrote: "It cannot possibly be acted; it is too titanic." (I am not here attempting to mitigate Mr. Welles' catastrophe on the grounds of insufficient rehearsal time; I mean only to point up the principle of such unprincipled restrictions.)

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Timing, wrote Louis Jouvet, is the secret of life; it is certainly the secret of utilising the rehearsal period to best advantage. To know how long to spend on what is about the most delicate of all rehearsal decisions.

The Russian method of sitting around a table and reading the script over and over again, despite occasional excesses, is very valid. (One such excess concerned a member of the Moscow Art Theatre who, after months of book-in-hand readings, jumped up and cried: "Comrades—I can't take it any longer. I must confess: I have already memorised my role!")

Despite the anecdote's implications, there is not enough round-table reading in the modern theatre. Producers cannot resist the temptation to "get the play moving." (Admittedly, it is often commercial pressure which necessitates such alacrity.) However, once a play is "moving" it no longer permits the contemplation and introspection which is the chief value of readings. If actors have to find their "reasons" at the same time they are trying to fuse movement and action into interpretation, the production will

suffer. It will suffer in a small, almost imperceptible way. For once the monster-play has begun to ambulate, all attention is directed towards finding it a track upon which to move; the whys and wherefores of text become obscured in transit.

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Actors (really good actors) are notoriously non-intellectual. Which does not mean one should forego intellectual explanation during the early rehearsals, but which does mean a director must sense when all that is necessary has been said. If intellectual guidance stops at the right time, it serves as an impetus to action. If it drags on after its time, it blurs and confuses all points already made. One of the great theatre-paradoxes is how brilliantly actors succeed in discovering the intellectual nuances of a text and how miserably they fail in realising them on the stage. The worst director I have ever known was the most glib and mentally alert person who ever analysed a script. The disparity between intellectual acumen and theatrical know-how is astonishing and grotesque and to be guarded against.

The natural tendency for actors and actresses (during all stages of rehearsal) is to perform without interruption in a mellifluent cascade of sound, fury and insensitivity. In the early stages this can be ruinous for it not only permits faults to become embedded in performance, it also establishes a precedent for non-intervention which, if broken later on, will be resented and resisted. The early rehearsals must be a series of erratic little steps; of stops and continuations; of tentative decisions and fearless reappraisals. And when a beat of a play, after trial and error, earns permanence, it must be conferred with definitiveness. The dismissal of all other alternatives must be a well-recognised fact. In actors, the tendency to revert to former discounted readings is al-

ways very great, and if not relentlessly rooted out, a director will find yesterday's cement has become today's clay. And each day the process will seem to start all over again.

Rehearsals are frighteningly organic; nothing ever stands still. What worked beautifully yesterday has today become unfeasible. What was fixed on Monday has become unhinged on Tuesday. Actor and director must be constantly adjusting themselves to the subtle metamorphosis of play progression. The transmigration continues even after opening night. By the time a play reaches its final performance it has truly undergone a life-span. These 'organic changes' however, are not sweeping reorganisations; they are as subtle and slight as the minute alterations life works upon human beings every day. In life, to a large extent, nature has control of us and we are subject to her workings. In the theatre, however, the actor controls nature and nothing must change without his knowledge and consent.

It is somewhat pointless to approach actors and actresses as if they were automata and capable of scientific precision. And it is equally short-sighted to believe any play requires an arithmetically-correct, exactly proportioned, dramatic working plan. Performances cannot possibly be exact reproductions one night after another. An actor is susceptible to too many extra-theatrical influences; i.e., his physical well-being, his psychologic state of mind, the coughing in the gallery, the weather, the international situation, etc. What *can* be fixed during rehearsals is the underlying current and quality of each dramatic moment. This undercurrent serves as an emotional track for performers, and once created by the actor, it almost always assures dramatic expression appropriate to the play. Its slight deviations do not violate the original intention since they are simply differences in degree and unconsciously regulated by the necessities of each performance.

Granted, it is easier for a director to insist upon a faithful reproduction of acting specifics (i.e. orchestrated vocalism, choreographed movement) and much more difficult to conjure up the underlying quality and general texture of a scene. But the difference between the two is very great; the former is a practised reproduction of external components; the latter, the creation of a dramatic basin in which performers can freely and fluidly operate, confident that all they do within the confines of that basin is in accordance with the playwright's aims and the director's design.

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Before actors can hope to interest an audience, they must first interest each other. Once they have succeeded in attracting each other's attention, they have a centre towards which they can invite the attentions of the spectator. It is outrageous for actors to think an audience will take an interest in something they themselves find laborious, mechanical and lifeless. Theatre begins when actors can command the same degree of attention the ordinary bystander unreservedly bestows upon the bricklayer and the ditch-digger. During rehearsals, the moment-to-moment web of interest is spun by actors. Only after it is delicately woven by them is it sturdy enough to ensnare the spectator.

Once the pattern of performance is fixed, the traffic blocked and the mutual interest created, the play should do nothing but indulge itself in run-throughs. When a scene has come to the run-through stage (and it should come rather early in the game) only notes should affect the structure of what has been built. The value of continuity cannot be overstressed. If, as is so often the case, a cast experiences the run-through only during one or two dress rehearsals preceding the opening, it has robbed itself of one of the

requisite joys of rehearsal: the feeling of the play unfolding. It is heinous that some actors never know the fluid, unbroken world of the play until opening night. In effect, such a want prolongs the rehearsal process beyond the actual opening date. The actor, unready to play, plays boldly and blindly, fending for himself as best he can in the face of happenings he never encountered in rehearsal. The audience, given an unfinished work, equates incompletion with lack of cohesion and reacts unfavourably. The meticulous, delicately organised art of the theatre becomes displaced by the plotless, exuberant fortuity which is its constant enemy.

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The English have a word for thoughtless performing which I find as pertinent as it is euphonic; the word is *gabbling*. Gabbling is what most actors do most of the time. It is the verbal transference of memorised lines between persons who, though they are facing each other and standing in good light, are not really seeing each other at all. It has all the punctuality, precision and vivacity of clockwork, and it is during rehearsal time that gabbling must be plucked out by the roots.

Understanding is what gives the impulse to action. It also advises the actor as to the kind of emotion the scene calls for. To a certain extent all acting is, at first, thought. I am not referring to intellectual analyses, but simply to the ordinary thought processes which translate the author's intent to the actor. Without understanding, the word ceases to function as a symbol for ideas and becomes a formal expression of rhythm and sound only indirectly associated with dramatic expression. During rehearsals (as during performances) thinking is a full-time job; it doesn't end after

the first readings when the play is ostensibly " all thought out ". It happens over and over again each time lines are mouthed and action performed. Despite the fact that most actors are *homines,* and despite the fact that most *homines* usually possess reasoning faculties, thinking, on the stage, has got to be deliberate. Anything repeated over and over again (as a play in rehearsal must be) tends to become hypnotic, and since hypnosis is the suspension and seizure of thought, it is a threat and an obstacle to good acting. The thinking habit must be assiduously implanted during the rehearsal process.

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The rehearsal period should not be entered into with omniscience, for once a play begins to piece itself together, no one really knows what will be found. The rehearsal period is necessarily a groping, stealthy, uncertain time, but underlying all that groping and uncertainty, there must be an awareness for what is correct so that when, after much dramatic prospecting, gold is struck it is recognised for what it is.

No matter how acute a director may be—no matter how methodically he has mapped out the course of the play—rehearsals will uproot new considerations and unlooked-for possibilities. No directorial preconception can gauge its specific effect upon a particular performer. The rehearsal process is as much social as it is artistic. As a director comes to learn the peculiarities of his actor, he begins to realise the suitability or unsuitability of each of his ideas. If he is wise, he adjusts them to fit the personality of the actor with whom he is working. It is easier to evoke an honest reaction from an actor if you discover the peculiar workings of his chemistry than it is to impose one of your own making. In

nine cases out of ten, the actor's characteristic reaction, because it is natural is the more effective.

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For some actors, the rehearsal process is simply a protracted waste of time. They have arrived at their interpretations the very first day and spend the ensuing weeks making slight alterations on their original conception. Their performance, at the end of rehearsals, is merely a ramified version of their first reading. They have, in effect, polished up and made presentable a ready-made characterisation, and the whole significance of the rehearsal process has passed them by. Such performers are deplorable for they make of the theatre a shoddy parade-ground for cheap tricks and functional devices. They divest the art of all of its science, industry and dignity. Such an actor must necessarily weary of the profession for, having created nothing, he has nothing to sustain. The run of the play becomes a time for static repetition of lifeless matter. Whereas the creative actor, with each performance, is altering, improving, deepening and perfecting a living characterisation. The unswerving, expeditious ready-made actor is a conspicuous dead weight in any company, and serves only to deflate the creative efforts of the others. He is too great a liability to be borne.

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To anyone in the theatre, acting and the business of acting refers most directly to rehearsals and not to performances. It is in rehearsal that one actually labours in the theatre. The " blood, sweat and tears ", such as they are, are all shed during those strenuous, temperamental weeks when the play is in the state of becoming. It is the most inspiring

time in the theatre and the most intimate for it is conducted exclusively amongst the theatre's journeymen in a spirit of concentrated devotion. It is the stage in its purest state, unsullied and unattended by outsiders. For a fleetingly short while, the outrageously public art of the theatre is secretly worshipped in industrious privacy.

★ 8 ★

Notes On Notes

THERE ARE various ways in which a director influences the course of a production, but the most direct, and potentially most effective, is the production-note : the scribbled criticism made by the director during rehearsals and then verbally conveyed to the actor.

It seems an easy matter. The director notes a deficiency and then points it out to the actor. What could be simpler? But the note-giving session is, in fact, the breeding ground of a thousand silent conflicts, antagonisms, irrational drives and semantic confusions. Theoretically, it is the place where errors are clarified; in practice, it is the place where the greatest confusions are sewn.

The majority of these confusions stem from the fact that notes are frequently too partial or too unqualified to make quick sense. It is useless, for instance, to single out technical errors without uprooting the idea which caused them to appear in the first place. One can rail against an inflection from now till doomsday, but unless one removes the misconception which automatically produces the wrong inflection the note will be a waste of time. Of course, lack of time is the ever-present enemy in the theatre and it is not always possible (or necessary) that a director justify his technical

notes by intellectually explaining their origin and intention. But the power of a concisely-expressed idea is never to be under-estimated. An image or an example given to an actor is often the equivalent of a hundred technical pointers. And when the root of an actor's fault is intellectual (i.e. a textual misunderstanding) the only sure way of remedying matters is by clarifying the *idea*; by chucking out one notion and substituting another. I have seen the suggestion of a simple parallel transform a scene which weeks of notes could not budge, and I realised that in trying to pull a car out of the mud, one must take hold of the wheels and not the bonnet.

One must be wary of too many notes. No matter how diligently an actor may fill up his notebook, he cannot assimilate too much too quickly. Unless one is sparing with notes the whole process of intellectual guidance (which is what note-giving amounts to) will utterly confuse the actor. A sense of proportion is absolutely necessary. There are always details one would like to see put right, and basic faults which *must* be put right. If one concentrates on basic issues, the smaller things often take care of themselves. If one places the wrong kind of emphasis, a performance will begin to improve in details and become flagrantly wrong-headed in fundamentals, and the actor will claim in his defence that he was too busy straightening out a cross or perfecting a piece of business. And he will be right.

It is amazing how often a director with great sensitivity to the drama can commit acts of gross insensitivity with his company. To the director, notes may simply be an expeditious means of clearing up mistakes, but to the actor it is a grading system. If an actor receives no notes at all, he assumes his performance meets with the director's approval. If he is admonished bitterly he takes it as a form of rejection and, if it happens before the others of the company, he

will often proffer a long-winded defence of his actions. The presence of the full company sometimes transforms the note-session into a courtroom drama. As if the rehearsal had been the actor on trial and the director's notes the verdict. This feeling can come about even when notes are entered into amiably and contain no undue severity. It is still a director's value-judgment on the work of his actors and, as such, must be handled delicately.

If time permits, it is always better to give notes privately. This immediately reduces the sense of 'verdict' and encourages a greater degree of attention. Not having to worry about what others are thinking the actor can concentrate more on what precisely is being said, and 'attention' is the key factor in this procedure.

The most difficult time to fix an actor's attention is during the note-session. Naturally! He knows he is going to be ticked off and his defence-mechanism protects him from hearing the criticism. The ways in which criticism is deflected by the actor are astounding in their subtlety. Sometimes an actor ignores the note with a demonstrative acceptance of it. The point has barely been made by the director and the actor is already agreeing madly, cursing himself roundly and praising the critical perspicacity which uncovered the fault. It is all a windy, largely unconscious tactic to avoid the bitter pill. Some actors will desperately clutch on to a detail only vaguely related to the point being made, in the hopes of misrouting the criticism. Some will hearken back to a point made weeks ago which is entirely irrelevant. Some will proceed to joke, or embark upon a tangent so conspicuously unrelated to the matter at hand that one marvels at its presumption. Some will sit nodding mechanically, their heads affirming the righteousness of the criticism while in their thoughts they are disembowelling the idiot who does not recognise the superiority of their per-

sonal discretion. They do not mean to be evasive and resistant, but it is their inescapable human nature. Actors, more-so than most, want approval and will fight to the death to avoid censure. And criticism through production-notes can be bitter censure.

I am, of course, generalising. There is the actor who is a model of conscientiousness and will hang on every word that drops from the director's lips, noting points carefully in a pad and applying them the very next rehearsal. This type carried to an extreme is the glutton for punishment. The actor who cannot believe he is doing a good job and who lusts after production-notes with all the manic anxiety of a masochist. However, the more common type is the actor who does not really grasp the production-note and therefore cannot implement it.

In order to impress an actor with a production-point, it is a good idea to take him by surprise. At a note-session, he automatically turns off his listening apparatus. He can't help it. It's involuntary. But, in other circumstances, he is as mentally accessible as anyone else. And it is sometimes the director's task to reach him in those 'other circumstances.' To catch him off guard.

When I have had a particularly important note to convey or felt that its purport had been missed in the note-session, I telephoned the actor in question. (The later the better; and if you get him out of bed, it will be all the clearer the next morning.) I have gone to parties with him on the pretext of 'having a good time' only to corner him in a more relaxed, slightly 'happy' frame of mind. I have, on occasion, typed out a note and pasted it on a lavatory wall in the hope that its unexpected discovery would drive home the point. And sometimes while relating a comic anecdote about myself, I would suddenly derail my train of thought and illogically insert a note the actor had not been hearing

at rehearsals. There is no device too outrageous if it succeeds in creating greater receptivity in the actor.

Another danger of production-notes is the tendency of the producer to assume the actor's role. I don't mean in the usual sense of demonstrating his point by acting out the actor's line (a practice which aggravates the actor beyond words) but the tendency to give a performance in his own right.

The actors have just rehearsed the play. They've strutted, vocalised and shown the mettle of which they are made. They now settle down around the director to receive notes. In a sense, the play is transferred from the boards to the auditorium. The director is given his cue, and he proceeds to dazzle his cast with insights, perceptions, theories, criticism and assorted hoopla. A director who denies the fact that he is frequently 'on' before his performers lies in his teeth. It is inevitable, and if he's worth his salt as a director, he cannot help having something of the showman about him.

But unless the director tacitly declines the invitation to perform, he will subvert his own authority. The main business of notes is to convey instructions and implant ideas. Sometimes this necessitates a certain amount of performance. Only by 'playing up' certain points is the actor made to realise their importance. And of course, a director must hold his audience of actors in the same way as they hold their audience. And so acting does enter into it.

But unless the notes are concerned with the business of the drama; unless what is being said is for the benefit of the actors rather than the satisfaction of the director, the rehearsal process will rapidly deteriorate. An actor has a sure sense of when a producer is talking for the play's sake or for his own. When the note is an acute observation of what actually occurred in the actor's mind, the actor will

be fascinated to find his personal choices discerned by an objective viewer. It will inspire his confidence and encourage his attention. When it contains a protracted theory or an anecdote or sheer levity as a substitute for perception, the actor will grow weary and withdraw. And it is this excessive waffle or vehement histrionics to no good end which prompts the actor to withdraw. If the director has something to say, he had best say it as clearly and as simply as he can. If it is an elaborate idea and cannot be simplified, let him express it in the most intelligent way he can. If he has nothing to say, he had better keep quiet. If he resists the tendency to *play the part of the producer,* deferring comment until he has something to contribute, the union between actor and director will be strengthened and the play will be the beneficiary.

★ 9 ★

Stanislavsky and Shakespeare

IT IS generally assumed that the Method approach and the plays of Shakespeare are utterly irreconcilable. This is probably because Stanislavsky's precepts are always thought of in connection with the realistic plays they have served most successfully. In Russia, the Chekhov and the Gorki; in America, the Odets, Miller and Williams.

To assert that the Method is not susceptible to Shakespearian verse is to infer that it is a watertight acting theory with limited applicability which already threatens its validity as theory of any kind. The fact is there can be no such thing as a theory of acting (*modus operandi* is a more accurate description) which excludes certain dramatic works from its frame of reference. Acting is the self-same current wherever it appears. It is the difference in dramatic forms which channelises that current into different straits. And so, when we consider classical acting, we are not analysing a queer bird totally unrelated to realistic acting, but a form of theatrical expression with characteristics peculiar to itself. It is the number and form of these characteristics which makes the difference; it is by no means a fundamental difference.

In a letter to Ellen Terry, George Bernard Shaw wrote: "In playing Shakespear, play to the lines, through the lines, on the lines, but never between the lines." In another letter to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, G.B.S. advised the actress: "When you play Shakespear, don't worry about the character but go for the music. It was by word-music that he expressed what he wanted to express, and if you get the music right, the whole thing will come right!"

The implication, in both places, seems to be that Shakespearian production is primarily dependent upon the proper rendition of the verse. This misconception of Shakespearian acting informs all the classic work in the British theatre; *in*forms it and *de*forms it. It is ironic that the people best equipped to present Shakespeare are the very ones who present him so badly. If the British theatre had not embraced the Shakespearian *tradition* to the point of strangulation, Shakespearian drama might be one of its most dynamic aspects. As it is, the Shakespearian *tradition* in England is merely a celebrated reiteration of banal acting techniques, ruthlessly inflicted upon a series of masterworks which will not succumb to the deadening force of its interpreters.

* * * *

Every Shakespearian play is, in reality, two plays. It is the dramatic circumstances enlivened by the characters who operate within them—triumphing over or being defeated by their particular conflicts; and it is the language which makes those circumstances and characters known to us. Although the language is the most tangible element in Shakespeare, it is by no means the most essential. Or, to put it another way, the only way Shakespearian verse becomes *essential* is when it is properly wedded to the emo-

tional content of the drama which, ostensibly, has given rise to it.

In England, there exists a fatal dichotomy between the verse in a Shakespearian opus and its inherent dramatic action. Today, in Shakespearian drama, one has not so much actors as players of verse. It is verse-playing which is taught in the drama schools, and verse-playing which the majority of the theatre-going public comes to see. Now, verse-playing in vacuo is a kind of glorified, ambulatory reading of Shakespeare. It can be very thrilling because the poetry is thrilling and, as poetry, entirely self-sufficient. As Shakespearian Readers, the majority of British actors and actresses are quite accomplished. But poetry wedded to credible action performed by three-dimensional characters is what transforms the written word into the living drama, and as actors of poetic drama, British actors are deplorably deficient.

The tradition (to come back to that horrible word which no one can escape when discussing theatre in Britain) is that Shakespearian drama is a kind of music. (Shaw didn't originate that theory; he merely subscribed to it.) Hence, the rehearsal of the five-act verse drama becomes a question of fixing the proper music.

Musicality is certainly an element in Shakespearian drama, but it is a by-product of the proper realisation of one's role; it is not an end to be sought in itself. For when an actor labours to pleasantly organise the tonal effects of his role, he stands in very great danger of succeeding. In arranging the superfices of drama, one cannot help but achieve results which are inherently external. And lo, there is *that* word again; that taunting, disagreeable word that stalks the acting profession in England.

* * * *

If Shakespearian drama is a kind of music then Sir John Gielgud is certainly its leading tenor. I do not subscribe to the opinion that Gielgud is simply " a voice." He is much more than that. He is the foremost exponent of the art of oral choreography. There isn't a *premier danseur* with Sadlers Wells who can match his lingual jêtès or labial pirouettes. He is a man who has institutionalised his particular deformation of theatrical art to the extent that it is now accepted as the norm. He is the rule against which the worth of all other actors are measured, and yet a rule whose every inch-marking is a foot off kilter. He is the personification of British Theatre, and in being so represents the ultimate triumph of artificiality; the triumph of the Conscious over the Unconscious; the Unreal over the Real; the Peripheral over the Essential.

Gielgud is a talented actor who constantly inverts his talent because of a basic misconception of what the theatre is all about. Believing, along with Shaw, that the trick in Shakespeare is to get the music right, he aggrandizes vocal interpretation and assumes everything else will follow accordingly. Audiences do not mind Gielgud's imbalance because his greatest fault (viz. the misconception that theatre represents the rectitude of language) is also his greatest asset. In speaking beautifully, he divinely errs in each of his performances. As a result of such a misconception *Prospero* becomes a kind of super-potent narrator—a glorified compère strolling through " The Tempest " rendering exposition and introducing fireworks. *Prospero* as *character* lies full fathom five beneath the glittering panoply of the well-spoken verse. One becomes interested not in what *Prospero* is but in what he says; indeed, he *becomes* what he says, and in consequence, the sympathies and antipathies which should be elicited by character are submerged in a general appreciation of tonal mellifluence.

To cite Sir John is not to single out a chance offender but to indict the exemplar, the glass of fashion in which British acting avidly approves its distorted image. But to return to our eternal incompatibles: Stanislavsky and Shakespeare.

One of the sins constantly thrown upon the heads of Method actors is that they cannot act the classics; given a Shakespearian milieu, they are inaudible, awkward and incompetent. This exaggerated criticism is founded on (a) unsubstantiated repetitions and (b) the need to chastise an acting system which, in placing such emphasis on natural behaviour, appears to violate that sense of formality which British actors associate with the classics. It is, to an extent, certainly true. But negligibly true. There haven't been enough examples of Method application to classics to lend great credence to the charge. Of course, the opposite can, as easily, be charged. A classically-weaned Shakespearian actor will find himself at a loss when compelled to interpret so-called 'real' characters in 'real' situations. For years he has been inculcating and assimilating artifice. Natural behaviour is something he reserves for everyday life. Never in his wildest dreams would he consider utilising the prosaic material of his true identity in the business of acting. For him the world of make-believe is entirely self-contained —untouched and untouchable by the hurly-burly currents of real life. He is a man who regularly transfuses coloured water into his blood vessels, then muses at the pallor in his cheeks.

The British actor prides himself on his technique. It is certainly admirable, but in over-emphasising technical means he wields too consciously an instrument which, if it is to do him service must be generated by a spontaneous emotional drive. It is the peculiar nature of technique that if it is applied too relentlessly it defeats its own purpose

and succeeds only in drawing attention to its apparatus.

* * * *

Too often the Stanislavsky-Shakespeare dispute dwindles into a ridiculous audibility *v.* non-audibility debate. No one in a proper state of mental balance advocates inaudibility in the theatre. Stanislavsky didn't and none of the New York directors stipulates that Mutter'n'Mumble be the native tongue of the Method actor. In essaying realistic drama, one assumes the manners of realistic speech; muttering and mumbling may be characteristic of such speech.

The real issue in this Stanislavsky-Shakespeare dispute can be boiled down to: first things first! The Method man realises that at the bottom of all great acting there must be an organic core of true feeling; an emotional substructure upon which the cultured superficialities of language naturally adjust themselves. The Shakespearian traditionalist starts at the end and works back. He organises the pattern of his role (the verse) and then proceeds to musicalise it into life. He must be made to understand that speech, be it resplendent Shakespearian verse or Millerian colloquies, is an assumption upon and reflection of feeling. Hence, speech which is not wedded to felt-emotionalism cannot help but ring false. The curse of the British theatre is that the false ring of Shakespearian acting has become its favourite song. The theatre-going public relishes it the way the idiot-child enjoys the dissonance of a mallet destroying a Steinway grand.

The Method actor, on the other hand, must be made to understand that the mouthing of blank verse is a physical condition of Shakespearian drama as is the brogue in Synge or the need for bodily control in French mime. It presumes the existence of certain muscles and certain abilities. It is

not so much vocal flexibility which American actors lack, but an awareness that there is such a thing as scansion in verse. This has been a great blind spot with American actors. Their attempts at Shakespeare often fail because they insist upon the colloquialisation of language which was conceived in stark formality. It may be interesting to conversationalise *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* but it cannot help but emasculate the poetry. In wrapping finite poetry into a general slur of attitude, the Method actor generalises out of existence the many passing images contained in the verse. It is the *salad* approach to Shakespeare, and it is so often *tossed salad* that Shakespearian production in America becomes downright unpalatable. However, Method actors can learn how to speak, but can non-Method actors learn how to feel?

If one approaches a Shakespearian role with the idea that it is basically different from all other kinds of drama, it will turn out 'conventionally Shakespearian'—which is to say, high-toned, over-zealous and hollow. No matter what research the actor may make into the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century modes of playing, when he comes to grips with Shakespeare, it is as a contemporary twentieth century actor engaging material which, if it is to have any theatrical pertinence, must be conveyed to a contemporary twentieth century sensibility. This necessitates (and justifies if it requires any justification) the search for emotional parallels. The greatness of Shakespearian works is that they lend themselves so readily to modern parallels. It is that which endows them with their most unique trait—timelessness.

There is only one aspect in which the basic emotions in the plays of Shakespeare differ from those of ordinary prose plays, and that is in *compression*.

In a modern prose play, a character has more time to dis-

pense emotion and looser material in which to distribute it. If he is slow in mustering his feelings, the play simply slows down in order to match his tempo. If he is naturally rapid, the play's pace quickens. Prose is the clay of the drama; an actor can mould it as he chooses. Poetry is its marble, and it demands adjustment. This is especially true of iambic pentameter. An actor plays it slowly at the risk of destroying its given rhythm. He plays it rapidly at the risk of slurring beats which demand their full theatre time. Shakespearian verse because it was conceived in scansion, possesses an almost metronomic imperative. One has just so many beats in which to express just so much emotion—and then one must go on to the next. This tends to marshal emotion in a way which is almost mechanical. Therefore, if *word* is to move forward with *feeling,* a balance must be struck. In this balance, emotion must be edited so finely that it absolutely coincides with the verse. There can be no such thing as overlapping in a Shakespearian scene for the actor has no beats in which to overlap, and should he furnish some of his own, he disturbs the pattern of the writing. He must experience his mood as soon as the verse signals its entry, and discard it as soon as the beat comes to an end. He must, in effect, chisel his feelings as sharply as he chisels his words. He must spark a poetic simile into life and still not lose the naturalistic thread of his conversation. He must illuminate an image with just enough light to make it visible and yet keep his beam focused on the functional matter of the verse. He must, for instance, give us the spice of " It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman which gives the stern'st goodnight," and yet not distract us from the meat of " He is about it; the doors are open, etc." In so doing, he *compresses* form and feeling so thoroughly that each realises the other without either being accountable by itself.

Rhythm, of course, is inherent in all acting, but in verse

drama, one does not simply have general tempo marks such as *presto, adagio* and *largo*; one has a veritable key-signature and in most of Shakespeare's works, that key-signature reads 5/5, viz. five beats to the measure. I don't mean to suggest that the playing of verse requires mechanical precision (the art of acting excludes mechanical precision) but when a playwright has provided a fixed rhythm, one can interpret that playwright faithfully only by expressing that rhythm. In Shakespeare, rhythm is not simply the consequence of writing in iambic pentameter, it is an element of the drama; it conveys mood and meaning as unmistakably as do the lines or situations.

In England, from about William Poel on, the metrical aspect of Shakespearian verse has been studied out of context. The discovery that poetry plays best when it maintains its original rhythm has obscured the fact that rhythm is never the same in two places and that emotion is what determines the rate of speed at which acting takes place. It is genuine feeling which regulates the tempo of Shakespearian verse and technical control which enables the verse and feeling to march together.

★ 10 ★

The Shakespearian Reality

ONE REASON which is always given for discarding the Method when producing Shakespeare is that the plays are not 'realistic.' Therefore, runs the argument, how can one apply a realistic mode of acting?

Of course, 'realism' is one of those words like 'truth' or 'love' or 'genius' which has been defined and redefined so many times one can never be sure there is enough of a shared connotation to justify its usage. But I imagine what most people mean by 'unrealistic' is, the plays are written in a way that real people do not speak (in verse), and they deal with happenings in far-away countries and in different periods which are not like life as we know it today.

The second objection, of course, is patently untrue. Love, jealousy and ambition today, are still made of the same stuff one finds in *Othello, Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*. As for the unreality of people speaking verse, it should be noted that speech-patterns are changing all the time, but speech-content hasn't changed since the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon utterance. The genteel prose of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be far removed from American beatnik jargon, but " Come live with me

and be my love," and " Hey, chick, let's share a pad," are still essentially the same idea.

Despite tortuous passages in plays like *Troilus and Cressida,* and the poetical officialese of many of the Histories, everything that Shakespeare ever wrote contains an idea. Not a profound intellectual concept; just an idea. Very often, a simple idea is wrapped up in a prolix passage.

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green; and that it us befitted
> To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe;
> Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
> That we with wisest sorrow think on him
> Together with remembrance of ourselves.

" We are of course sorry about the king's death, and it's only right we shed a tear or two, but at the same time we've got to think of ourselves, and so I've upped and married his widow." The English, I grant you, is less eloquent, but it contains an idea which is easily comprehensible and capable of being played.

In order for it to be made practicable from an actor's standpoint, a great deal of Shakespearian verse has first to be translated into simple ideas. It is a known fact that actor and producer are often at odds over the interpretation of prose dialogue, and if this is so, one can imagine the number of confusions that might arise from effusive imagery or elaborate verse-patterns. The reduction of verse into simple ideas gives the actor a grasp of one reality; his own, that of his own time and place—enabling him to approach the roots of Shakespeare's reality, which is different from his own only in the manner of utterance and degree of intensity. The alternative to a clear understanding of the meaning is often an aggravated session during which the produ-

cer tries to *fake* meaning into the verse by insisting upon specific emphases or inflections. I do not believe this can be done successfully. If an actor does not understand the line: " It is the cause, it is the cause my soul," he can point ' cause ' as hard as he likes and still convey nothing. There is nothing quite so subtle and variegated as an inflection. Given mechanically, it can produce any one of a thousand meanings. Whereas an inflection born of understanding conveys the sense unmistakably.

There are, of course, certain passages in Shakespeare which cannot be easily reduced to simple ideas for the good reason that they are not in themselves simple. But, by guiding the actor to the contemporary parallel, he may find his way more readily to the classical concept.

In *Troilus and Cressida* there is a long-winded scene in which the Trojans discuss the advisability of keeping Helen or letting her go. In Hector's first speech, there occurs the following passage:

> Since the first sword was drawn about this question
> Every tithe soul 'mongst many thousand dismes
> Hath been as dear as Helen—I mean, of ours
> If we have lost so many tenths of ours,
> To guard a thing not ours, nor worth to us
> Had it our name, the value of one tenth,
> What merit's in that reason which denies
> The yielding of her up.

Although slightly involved, the thought is clear enough: As a result of holding on to Helen, war has been waged and we have lost hundreds of our soldiers. Since Helen is of no real worth to us and so expensive to keep, why in hell should we hang on to her? To this Troilus, in a flashy bit of sophistry, declares:

Fie, fie my brother!
Weigh you the worth and honour of a king
So great as our dread father, in a scale
Of common ounces? Will you with counters sum
The past-proportion of his infinite?
And buckle-in a waist most fathomless
With spans and inches so diminutive
As fear and reasons? fie for godly shame.

Which, roughly broken down, means: Dad's importance is not to be measured like any ordinary bloke's. He is beyond the reach of mundane logic, and you're a bit of a cad for trying to invoke simple reason. Troilus goes on to harangue common sense ending with . . .

Nay if we talk of reason
Let's shut our gates and sleep: manhood and honour
Should have hare hearts would they but fat their thoughts
With this cramm'd reason: reason and respect
Make livers pale and lustihood deject.

A soldier really worth his salt would just storm into battle for the hell of it, and not mess about with whys and wherefores. If men started intellectualising war, they would all turn chicken. Hector replies: Helen's not worth her keep. To which Troilus replies: " What is aught but as tis valued" Upon which cue Hector delivers the following:

But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds its estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer: tis mad idolatry
To make the service greater than the god:
And the will dotes, that is attributive
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of the affected merit.

Which, when untangled, means something like: A thing has an inescapable objective value apart from what one may personally think of it. And it's a little soft-headed to prize something just because *you* think highly of it without realising its true worth in the open market.

I do not claim that a minute breakdown such as this will result in a dazzling interpretation; only that it sets interpretation on to its first proper plateau: that of understanding. Once the actor is in possession of the 'idea' of his speeches, the verse will assume its proper shape. Certain words will receive emphases; others will be thrown away, and there will appear in the poetry that persuasive music which can only come about when an actor knows what he's talking about.

It may seem that I am belabouring the obvious and I will be told that every actor begins by understanding his role before he sets out to interpret it. I know, however, that this is not the case, and that a great amount of precious rehearsal-time is taken up with trying to 'make the verse work' by means of external arrangements, rather than internal understanding. The difficulty of verse is so much taken for granted that actors feel obliged to spend most of their time 'phrasing' and 'colouring'—instead of digging out meaning, and verifying the sense.

To overcome the seeming unreality of the Shakespearian drama, it is useful to etch in bits of outside reality. This can be accomplished through the use of improvisation; in two main exercises; The Parallel Situation and The Unwritten Scene.

The Parallel Situation is an improvisation in which the actor, choosing feasible equivalents for scene and character, devises a modern story which resembles that of the given play.

(1) KING LEAR: I, 1: An aged father, proud but infirm, summons together his immediate family (including his three daughters) to read his last will and testament. He finds that his favourite daughter, to whom he had planned to bequeath the bulk of his estate, is reluctant to express her affections. Misconstruing this restraint for ingratitude, he angrily disowns the girl and orders her out of the house.

(2) JULIUS CAESAR: II, 1: A disgruntled and ambitious soldier comes to call on his senior officer to propose they join forces and oust the Commander of their Battalion who has consistently abused his power. The senior officer, uncertain as to which is the right course, is eventually persuaded that if the commander remains in power, tyranny will ensue. They plot to remove the commanding officer by the use of force.

(3) MACBETH: I, 6: A weak-willed executive is urged by his wife to murder the director of his firm who is staying the weekend in his country house. The executive's wife, anxious for her husband's advancement, persuades him this is a golden opportunity to remove the obstacle to his business success. Provoked by his wife's words and his own innate desire for promotion, the executive is persuaded to commit the crime.

In the Parallel Situation, there is no attempt to reproduce the original situation beat by beat. One tries mainly to evoke the parallel emotions in the hope that once these have been created spontaneously, they can be transferred to the other context. The advantage of such improvisations is that they endow the actor with the psychological and kinesthetic reality that *ought to be* behind the dramatic situation. Often, the result seems slight and fragmentary, but once work on the play is resumed, the memory of the

improvisation feeds the later rehearsals, unconsciously strengthening the tissue of the scene.

* * * *

In Shakespeare there are a number of Unwritten Scenes, viz. events or incidents which we are told of but never actually see. In Macbeth for instance (II, 2) it would be useful to improvise the scene previously enacted in Duncan's chamber: a scene described in detail by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Set in Duncan's bedroom, we would see the grooms faintly dozing as Macbeth entered; we would see them stir awake and then stare through their drunken torpor as Macbeth slayed them. We would then see the actual murder of Duncan. Macbeth's hasty escape, and after a moment, the entrance of Lady Macbeth into the chamber. The smearing of the daggers with the grooms' blood; the reaction to the lifeless Duncan, etc.

Such a scene, properly plotted and effectively executed, would endow the actor playing Macbeth with a new dimension of reality: the reality of what happened in Duncan's chamber. It might give the whole of II, 2 a new pertinence, and the actress playing Lady Macbeth a deeper insight into her reactions to the murder, and a solid justification for her subsequent insanity. It would enable both actor and actress to share a common reality (the improvised scene) rather than a common theory (the verbal assumption of what *might* have happened and how they might have felt).

In a play like *The Merchant of Venice*, an improvisation between Shylock and Bassanio depicting their encounter on the Rialto could very well establish the nature of a relationship which is textually obscure. The crux of Shylock's contempt for Bassanio, and the ruthlessness it inspires in the

trial scene, is the pivotal factor in Shylock's character. If that attitude can be clarified through improvisation, an important (and missing) dimension is added to the play.

In *Othello*, where the relationship between the Moor and Desdemona must be in full swing by Act One, Scene 2, it is essential that actor and actress share a common understanding. In the case of highly imaginative performers, it may be enough to rely upon the text, but if Othello and Desdemona have *experienced* scenes of courtship, of mutual attraction, of sharing secrets and stories, the actors have something concrete to relate to: the improvised reality of their relationship as it actually developed. That mutual experience might well enhance those moments (I, 2) in which such experience is alluded to.

In *Hamlet*, it would be interesting to witness the Prince's initial arrival at Elsinore. Summoned in haste without proper explanation; told (perhaps by Horatio) of the death of his father and the marriage of his mother to his uncle. Sensing the immediate impact of the news, the actor playing Hamlet might better determine the manner in which these events are recollected in Act I, Scene 2. And for Ophelia's sake, it might be useful to play out the scene described in II, 2 (" He took me by the wrist and held me hard ") to try and decide precisely what Ophelia's attitude towards Hamlet is, and particularly what it was during that scene.

In all of this I have tried to imply the ' potential ' value of such improvisations because, quite obviously, they can be a waste of time. If no degree of reality is created in the improvisation, it will have just been a useless verbal exchange. If the improvisational choices were inappropriate to the characters as depicted by the author, it will have been downright destructive.

The Unwritten Scene, in order to be really useful, has got to be carefully monitored by the producer. It is he who

must assign the scene's outline, and he who must afterwards delete all its irrelevancies. If the proper material has been provided, and the appropriate feelings evoked, the Unwritten Scene can serve as a vein of pure gold underlying the progress of the play. It can, if successful, convey that sense of accuracy which confirms the existence of the playwright's world. And since this is a possibility it is certainly worth a try.

A Shakespearian character possesses an extra-ordinary definition. There are a number of reasons for this; the vivid suggestiveness of the verse, the prevalence of 'humours,' the repeated use of standardised types, the fact that so many of the plays were based on existing stories or earlier plays. All of this tends to give a Shakespearian character a classical kind of clarity. He doesn't come from nowhere. He has a traceable literary and historical progeny. He possesses a fixed attitude; an indicative bearing; a pronounced temperament. Iago is black-hearted the first moment we see him. Hamlet, pensive; Macbeth wavering; Falstaff, gusty; etc. Each of these characters comes before us in a *State of Being*; imbued with a given quality and proceeding towards one goal or another.

The first moments of any entrance are the most dangerous. If the actor steps off on the right foot, the character is properly routed, and the course of the play comparatively smooth. If he doesn't, precious moments are spent in trying to gain dramatic equilibrium, and there is great danger of an inner sprawl—that silent and internal loss of balance which makes the performance a protracted cliff-hang in which words are shrubs, and moves, jutting promontories.

The State-of-Being is never to be taken for granted. It must be consciously nurtured before the entrance. It grows out of an actor's off-stage concentration, and feeds on the intake of appropriate imagery. The actor must tell himself

little stories about the character; where he has come from; where he is going; how he feels; what he wants, etc. He must try to experience the initial reality of his role so that he is *turned* on before he *steps* on. If he succeeds, his very first reaction (the response to the set, the characters already on stage, the existing atmosphere, etc.) will be instinctively correct.

Naturally, a character's State-of-Being changes every moment of the play, but if the first State-of-Being is correct, the subsequent changes will be organic. If there is no initial State-of-Being, the actor is forced to simulate one, piecemeal. And so he spends precious time grappling with inner-mechanics while interpretation coasts along on empty dialogue and involuntary moves. The first State-of-Being is like an emotional tucking-in of all loose ends. The character, dramatically intact and emotionally geared, steps into the drama in all his theatrical entirety. Being himself unified, he is capable of performing with unity, cohesion and consistency.

In Shakespeare, where the textual demands are so great and the technical requirements so varied, the State-of-Being becomes particularly important. Fortunately in most of the plays the required State is clearly indicated.

What I have tried to suggest then, is that the Shakespearian reality is an element which has to be *restored* to the plays. Not *supplemented* or *imposed*, but restored—for it was there to begin with but has become obscured by the glitter of the verse and the weight of the spectacle. The concept that attempts to separate Poetry from Realism continually confuses this issue. In the theatre, poetry is an intensification of reality, not a stylistic substitute. The Shakespearian actor, out of a tradition which has encouraged reverence rather than understanding, has been playing the *poetical intensities* without relating them to the funda-

mental reality. To recapture this Shakespearian reality, we have got slightly to withdraw from the plays themselves, and try to recreate, in terms of contemporary understanding, the intentions, passions and events which live within the poetry.

★ II ★

Indication: The Acting Which is Not

WHEN A performer is unable to achieve that degree of involvement which distinguishes genuine acting he often, automatically, falls back upon a form of theatrical-behaviourism which serves as an easy substitute. This theatrical-behaviourism has been described earlier as being founded on stock-symbolism.* In order to pursue the next theme, I would have the reader associate the word Indication with this substitute form of acting. To *indicate* then, in our specialised usage, is to communicate the intent of the play by means of a standardised " manner " of stage behaviour which is to acting what plastic is to leather, or rhinestones to diamonds.

When a performance lacks true acting fibre, it relies on the sustained Indication as a means of survival. Such a performance is not without effect. But it does not satisfy for long and produces a curiously negligible impact. *Impact* is perhaps too strong a word, for the play in these circumstances has no real emotional impact; it merely impresses itself on the mind, lightly brushing those emotions it is intended to upheave. Its responses are similar to those evoked by a story-teller. The raconteur's acting ability is not what

* See Chapter 1.

holds the listener's attention; he is simply the medium through which the story is being related. The listener is *tuned in* to the events being narrated. The line of the story, its twists, turns, transitions and climaxes exist almost independent of the speaker who, usually, is attempting nothing more than a vivid verbal description. In depicting these events, the story-teller does not, in himself, try to recreate the emotions involved; he merely describes their nature. (" Then he grew very frightened. She was happy and began to laugh. He was hysterical and found it hard to breathe," etc.) The real drama of the tale is being enacted in the listener's imagination; an imagination being fed images by the raconteur. Very often the story will move us to tears or laughter, but our emotional reaction will not be caused by the *performance* of the story-teller, but by the *effect* of his story on our imaginations. Our natural empathy, our ability to *feel* our way into the characters and actions being described, will affect us more than any histrionic quality in the speaker.

Being affected by events in which we are only slightly involved is not a rare or abnormal occurrence. Often, when we are extremely bored by some B-film or cheap novelette, the chief character will make some great sacrifice or experience some rare goodness, and we shall feel the lump in our throat and the tear in our eye, in spite of the fact that our critical sense has been constantly censuring the material before us. It is almost as if dramatic interest was independent of our critical faculties and not to be overruled by them.

The manner used by the story-teller in conveying a narrative is, in essence, the same manner used by the Indicating actor. The way in which we accept (or are persuaded to accept) the rankest Indication can be best illustrated by examining the amateur stage.

An amateur production is, more often than not, a social gesture towards the drama. Men and women with no artistic pretensions put on wigs and costumes, assume characters and go through the motions of re-creating people in dramatic circumstances. In almost all of these cases, the *modus operandi* resorted to is Indication.

Non-actors, finding themselves on the stage, fall back on the clichés and stereotypes they instinctively associate with the theatre. On a quasi-dramatic level, using the conventions of the stage (rather than the conventions of the raconteur), they indulge in the same illustrative unfelt emotionalism as that of the story-teller. Their performances are, as it were, completely in quotes and parentheses. Behind their every word and move they are saying: "You see, this is what the character is feeling now; this is what he looks like when he is angry; this is the way he stomps out of the room." This kind of acting promotes a mutual understanding between actor and audience; an understanding that confers upon the actor the same degree of objectivity possessed by the spectator. But when an actor is fulfilling the demands of his art he necessarily sheds his objectivity and achieves an artistic *subjectivity*. We cannot really enter into the mind and heart of Hamlet if we are preoccupied with the man who is *pretending to be* Hamlet. It is like trying to focus a split-image. We achieve focus (and interest) when that split-image fuses into one. It is only when that one image is the character nourished and directed by the actor that theatre becomes satisfying and compelling.

The incidence of Indication is not restricted to the stage. Non-actors who attempt to emphasize their intentions, automatically fall into the same habit. One evening I saw a girl standing in Oxford Street, obviously waiting to meet someone. Directly opposite her a group of people were

queueing to enter a cinema. Having nothing better to do they began to watch the girl. Suddenly aware of their attention, the girl started squinting her eyes, checking her watch, peering from side to side, her face becoming disfigured with an expression of intense expectancy. The girl wanted to convey to her impromptu audience that she was not a streetwalker or an idler, but simply waiting for a person whom she had arranged to meet. Before she became conscious of the crowd, she was totally involved in waiting for her escort, comfortably idling her time and watching for his arrival. But as soon as she felt the need to convey her purpose to the crowd she automatically over-emphasized all the actions she had, a moment before, been performing quite naturally. The checking of the time, the squinting of the eyes, the searching grimace—all served to underline what was, from the outset, thoroughly apparent. As a result of these involuntary indications, she became tense and nervous. Consequently, we on the cinema-queue became aware of her in a new way. Not as someone waiting for an escort, but as someone executing exaggerated gestures and nervous little movements. In short, we became conscious of her as a performer, and if she *had been* a performer, we should have been aware of her 'acting' in a way we could not possibly have found convincing.

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In an Indicated performance, a performance in which neither our senses are deeply affected nor our sympathy greatly aroused, we psychologically *come to terms* with what is being offered from the stage. We begin to listen to it in the same way that we listen to our non-histrionic story-teller. The drama becomes a form of narration, slightly aided by demonstration. At an intolerable film we often

say to our companion: "Let's just stay till the next scene to see how it turns out." There is an implicit assumption that the film is not really pleasing us or even holding our attention. At best, we find it mildly interesting, and although our senses dismiss it, that mass clearing-house in the mind whose full-time job is the filtering of small talk and routine communication, requests that we persevere with it a moment or two longer—just so its mechanical explanatory nature may completely fulfil itself. Of course, when the execution is too laboured, our cerebral clearing-house does not even display *that* much interest and we simply turn off the drama as we might a faulty wireless riddled with static.

However, most plays do not outrage our senses to the extent that we turn our back on them. Most of them possess that same modicum of dramatic interest we find in the anecdote, but because that slender dramatic quantity is being performed before our eyes instead of merely drummed into our ears, we give it a more formal attention, often deceiving ourselves that we are experiencing drama.

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From the preceding, it would appear that Indication is the worst acting crime imaginable and the actor who employs it the foullest mummer on the boards, but this is not the case. It is a crime only when it serves as the basis for all performance; when Indication is sought as an end in itself or, what is worse, when it is not recognised for what it is but accepted and approved as organic acting. Then it tends to undermine the rule of genuine acting and to reduce the possibility of real interplay between the actors. Further, it operates as a harmful filter between the playwright and his

audience, making shallow and unconvincing what, literally, may be utterly sincere and straightforward.

However, Indication is a necessary piece of subsidiary equipment and without it a performance could turn into a series of rocketing ascents and abysmal declines. No actor, no matter how experienced and no matter how talented, can sustain a genuinely felt performance from first curtain to last. Those moments of inspiration about which Stanislavsky was wont to rhapsodise, are necessarily few and far between. To fill up the gaps, the actor must fall back on technique, i.e., playing on a more conscious (more technical) level. And so, he must be capable of producing first class Indications.

Here, however, the opprobrium of Indication is lessened because in bolstering the genuine moments in an actor's performance, it serves as more than a mere expedient. Here it becomes a useful auxiliary. Utterly functional, operating on a level which is clearly beneath that of the best work, it remains *organically* second-rate; which is to say, capable of instantaneous graduation. By maintaining a certain histrionic heat, it can come to the boil more readily than acting which is constitutionally lukewarm. Indication, in the worst sense, is acting which negates organic connection with itself and reaches an audience by means of brash, frontal attacks. It is a playing *to* the audience by playing *off* oneself. This destroys contact and involvement and chains the actor to consciousness; he then goes about the fatal business of trying to gratify the audience's imaginary wants. But Indication which resorts to technique in self-defence, because the actor feels he simply cannot *make* a particular climax, is still organically linked to what has gone before, and though it is of a lower order, it never severs its affinity with what is best in an actor's performance. Self-defence Indication is an expedient, and one which every actor has

recourse to. Its justification must be the excellence of the technique which supports it, and its ambition, to rise to a higher, less conscious level of acting.

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After roundly demolishing the ethic behind the Representational style of acting (which was Indication enthroned and officially sanctioned), Stanislavsky writes; "Nevertheless 'representing' the part, since it partly follows our process, must be acknowledged to be a creative art." I should like a more exact translation of this passage than the Hapgood books provide, but still, the general idea is clear enough. Stanislavsky, who lived in a theatrical milieu in which Indication was worshipped as great art, could not repudiate his contemporary European theatre without repudiating such actors as Coquelin and Antoine, but it was not only for this reason that he granted amnesty to Representationalism, but because he realised the importance of this subsidiary acting as an adhesive and bolstering factor to his own. Indication-acting can be compared to a vaccine composed of small doses of that same disease which it is designed to combat. A small amount nurtures health in a performance; an overdose can be fatal.

Elsewhere Stanislavsky says: ". . . clichés will fill up every empty spot in a role which is not already solid with living feeling. Moreover, they often rush in ahead of feeling and bar the road." The clichés to which he alludes (and they are the blood corpuscles of Indications) have their function. At a play's highpoint, the introduction of an Indication (cliché) will be intolerable and, what is more to the point, conspicuous. However, a cliché in acting—just as a cliché in writing—can be effective if it is properly modified and arranged. The June-moon rhymes of talentless

undergraduates are not the sophisticated inventions of a Cole Porter or a Lorenz Hart, and yet both are working with the same banal materials. Because the professional is aware of the ill-effects of his clichés, he takes pains to soften and modify those effects. It is only in the insensitive that a cliché is truly odious. The two alternatives are not, as Stanislavsky suggested, "clichés" or "living feelings"; there is a wide middle area which, when void of living feeling, can be rescued from fatal clichés by conscious ingenuity. But it must be pointed out that this is simply an expeditious second-best; just as it must be pointed out that a series of well-executed second-bests are absolutely necessary to an actor playing seven or eight performances a week, and prone to the power-failures which are a constant hazard in the acting profession.

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As I review the points made in this chapter, I see that the issue underlying all of them has to do with that ubiquitous acting dispute, Feeling or non-Feeling, Conscious or Unconscious, Masks or Faces. When a matter is torn with contention, some sage usually springs up to declare that the 'truth' does not lie with one side or the other, but somewhere in between. This is the sort of nonsense which is very dear to the democratic mentality. That somewhere-in-between is invariably the product of elements drawn from one side or the other, and if one persisted in analysing this middle-zone one could continue refining the rights and wrongs of a question until one viewpoint lost so much ground that it was discredited. But intellectual analyses rarely go that far. However, as far as acting is concerned, I do believe there exists a kind of compromise-actuality as opposed to a compromise-truth. The actuality is that it is al-

most humanly impossible for an actor to be totally involved in his role from beginning to end; the incidence of entrances and exits themselves cause a series of breakages and the other distractions are innumerable. Since acting can make us accept things which are not really so, it is possible for an actor who is not genuinely involved to tighten his performance with conscious, technical assists in such a way that we never become aware that he is drawing upon technical means.

In acting, the true and the technical fit like a hand in a glove—and as is so often the case, a gloved hand lifts easily what a bare hand cannot.

★ 12 ★

Enter Mr. Brecht

To those familiar with the theories of Bertolt Brecht, the last chapter will have strongly suggested parallels with the Epic style of acting, and particularly Brecht's *Verfremdung* or Alienation-Effect. In describing this technique, Brecht appears to be calling for blatant indications; i.e., acting which is openly representational and consciously put before an audience with no attempt at emotional involvement. In point of fact, the cornerstone of the Brechtian acting *is* Indication, but the paradox is that far from being radically different from Method acting there is a perplexing similarity. Before we begin to make comparisons, it is important to understand the conceptual difference between Stanislavsky and Brecht.

Firstly, there was the difference in intention. Brecht was mainly concerned with using actors; Stanislavsky, with training them. But in the Germany of the twenties, the plays of the Epic Theatre were relatively new-fangled, and it was necessary to formulate a new acting technique. Brecht devised an approach which suited his own works, Stanislavsky, on the other hand, merely tried to define what was already the approach in the case of certain gifted actors like Shchepkin, Lensky, Talma and Salvini.

In the Brechtian theatre, the intellectual implication is

all, and in order for that implication to be made, the mind's supremacy must never be undermined by the flow of feelings. In the theatre of Stanislavsky, the proper degree of feeling is the first consideration. Once this is achieved, the drama proceeds to reproduce the reality of life. Stanislavsky hoped to transport the spectator; Brecht, to remind him of his present whereabouts. To Stanislavsky, the ideal centre for the audience was the heart of the given circumstances; for Brecht, it was the dialectical complexity which underlay those circumstances. Stanislavsky strove to make the actor 'feel' so as to make the audience 'experience'; Brecht attempted to make the actor 'demonstrate' so as to make the audience reason.

In the act of Alienation, the implication of a scene would be clearly set apart from the play's action—existing as limpid, theoretical symbols which the spectator would then be able to resolve in his own way. By distancing the action in this way, the feelings of an audience would not interfere with their critical faculties. They would no longer be swayed by emotions, or carried away by 'excitement.' Instead, they would view the acts of men in the same frame of mind they might arbitrate a street quarrel or analyse an historical event. Their concern for the disputants would be fostered dramatically, but the resolution of the conflict would not be prescribed. It would, instead, be proven or nullified by the spectator's own sense of right and wrong. And always, the spectator would be aware of the alternatives—so that in affirming one view, he was forced to discount another. Here was a form of drama in which the central character was always the spectator, and the deciding factor his sense of values.

The theory provokes a number of questions, such as: is an audience capable of determining objective right and wrong when the play contains an obvious bias? Should

plays be devised for the sake of moral and intellectual appraisal? Can an event which occurs on the stage—something artistically premeditated and systematically rehearsed—be other than a dramatic event? Is not the means of Alienation, only a rarefied kind of stylisation? These arguments have been going on since the twenties and to enter into them is to immerse oneself in one set of clichés or another. I think it will be fruitful to explore only that part of the Brechtian theory which tries to distinguish between Realistic acting and that of the Epic Theatre.

Brecht declares that his objective is to " make the spectator assume an enquiring, critical attitude towards events " . . . " to alienate that social gesture which underlies all events. By ' social gesture ' is meant the mimetic and gestural expression of social relations between men in a particular epoch."

In Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing*, the social circumstances which aggravate the characters are the play's ever-present character. One is constantly aware of the cloying social pressure, nor can one understand the play without taking into consideration the social relations " between men " in that " particular epoch." The social circumstances and their concomitant moral implication grow out of the play's terrain and condition every single character. And yet, all of this comes about without alienation, the play having been first performed by the Method-trained Group Theatre company which played it to the height of dramatic credibility.

In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* we have another example of a play which emotionally stuns its audience, involves it in personal relations, and yet clearly spells out the social evil it is there to impugn. Contrary to Brecht's contention that only a sense of objectivity can guide the

spectator's decisions, in *The Crucible* we arrive at the moral judgment after a staggering emotional journey. We are not any the less 'objective.' On the contrary, we are *more* objective because in the course of events we have *experienced* the pros and cons of the moral issue. Brecht would say, we should not 'experience' them; we should *deliberate* them, weigh them up and then decide. But on questions of personal liberty and social oppression, is it possible for people to deliberate coolly? Are moral judgments weakened or enforced by our personal involvement in the living issues? Must we not *feel* right and wrong strongly?

It might be charged that Miller stacks his cards against the witch-hunters; but no more than Brecht does against the capitalists. With Miller as with Brecht our sympathies will be on the side of the persecuted. The 'good' characters will seem to personify the proper moral position, but only because it's been pre-arranged. Objectivity may be a journalistic virtue; but it's an artistic impossibility.

Elsewhere Brecht has written the single aim of the Alienation Effect is to show "how the world works, to the end that the world may be changed." Brecht, for all his diagrams, charts, slides, titles and maps, shows how the world works by dramatic inference—through the relevant selection of familiar happenings, organised in such a way as to make them unique. So do the non-Epic playwrights! In *Death of a Salesman* we see how Willy Loman's world works, and implicit in that vision are the fatal consequences of such workings. We see that life could be changed if we have the courage to repudiate Willy Loman's false values. We come to recognise the powerful forces that maintain the lethal social machine which grinds the salesman to his death. We see, through the perceptions of his son, the fallacies which have destroyed the father, and in seeing the alternatives that now remain for the other characters, we

recognise the alternatives that exist for ourselves. We see and understand all of this with the ever-open eye of feeling. Our sight in these matters is in no way hampered by the tear; our minds in no way fogged by our sympathy with the character's conflict. We reason all the more clearly for having been shown the error of another's reasoning.

In a sense, every great play possesses its own A-Effect. It is the assimilation of the play's ideas with our own thinking; and it invariably happens *after* the performance. It may be interesting for it to happen *during* the performance, but it does not necessarily insure any greater degree of insight.

The underlying contempt of the Epic Theatre is directed against Illusion; the 'phoney' magic which plunges the spectator into a state of unreasoning hallucination. But in opposing the theatre of illusion, Brecht seems to forget that an 'idea' is as much an illusion as anything else. Especially when that idea is depicted by fabricated characters and arbitrary events. The social point of a Brechtian drama is a methodical contrivance; just as everything in the theatre is a methodical contrivance—even the desire to emphasize 'methodical contrivances.' The illusion of thought is as prefabricated as the illusion of feeling. A theatrical idea exists only because the playwright has provided a suitable frame of reference, a set of characters to personify the idea, and a set of circumstances to contain it. Emotionalism in the theatre is devised in precisely the same way. The reality of a man being killed on the stage may be an illusion, but so is the reality that claims he is killed by the ruthless exploitation of power-monopolies. Furthermore, the knowledge that Brecht's ideas are conditioned by Marxist thinking gives them a predictability which is hard to reconcile with all that gaff about moral objective conclusions. We know that the morally-correct Brechtian conclusion will

always be the one that favours proletarian ethics; and the foreknowledge of anything in the theatre always cuts into our interest.

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The Alienation Theory is so riddled with inconsistencies that Brecht is forced to make endless qualifications in order to convey his ideas. He writes: "the technique of the A-Effect is diametrically opposed to that by which empathy is produced. The technique of the A-Effect actually prevents actors from producing empathy," adding carefully—"at least to the usual extent." "Yet," he says a little further on, "they do feel themselves into other people in order to take on their characteristics . . . They must *act* without being completely transformed—what a director does when showing an actor how to perform a certain passage." And then: "Giving up the idea of complete transformation, the actor brings forward his text not as an improvisation but as a *quotation*. At the same time, it is clear that he has to render, in this quotation, all the undertones, all the concrete plastic detail of a full human utterance. His gestures, though they are frankly a *copy* (and not spontaneous) must have the full corporeality of human gestures."

Here, Brecht comes precious close to saying the actor must *indicate*, and yet indicate so well that he convinces the audience that he is behaving realistically. In order to avoid this blatant contradiction he resorts to hair-splitting qualifications and rebounding phrases such as "the concrete plastic detail of full human utterance" and "the full corporeality of human gestures"—which is only a prolix way of saying *realistic behaviour*.

Let's see how radical the Epic Theatre dicta are in relation to those of the so-called Dramatic Theatre. In Eric Bentley's comparative chart (*The Playwright as Thinker*:

Reynal and Hitchcock, New York), he sets out the differences.

"In the Dramatic Theatre," says Bentley, "the stage embodies a sequence of events; in the Epic Theatre, the stage narrates the sequence." But even in the Brechtian Theatre, the narration is *embodied* in that the events are 'acted out' and not merely monitored. "The Dramatic Theatre," says Bentley, "involves the spectator in an action —the Epic Theatre makes him an observer." This is, of course, the Brechtian intention rather than the Brechtian result. The visits of the Berliner Ensemble have shown that the Brechtian actor, to all intents and purposes, is as involved as the actor of the Moscow Arts Theatre, and it was Brecht's lament to the end of his life that his plays were being misunderstood by his public because the spectator was constantly being emotionally overcome. The chart goes on:

THE DRAMATIC THEATRE	THE EPIC THEATRE	
uses all the spectator's energy, his will to action	awakes his energy	The energy that a spectator expends in watching a play is entirely unrelated to the energy awakened in him for extra-theatrical acts. A spectator may be sapped in the theatre and still emerge with a powerful will to act.
allows him feeling	demands decisions	By allowing him feeling, the Dramatic Theatre brings the spectator to that point where, if the play demands decisions, he will be provoked enough to make them.
communicates experience	communicates pieces of knowledge	In the theatre, pieces of knowledge are conveyed mainly through the dramatisation of experience. In Brecht it is not so much "pieces of knowledge" as it is knowledge pieced out of dramatised experiences.

spectator is brought into action	is placed in front of an action	If the spectator believes the action which is placed in front of him, he is automatically brought into it.
is plied with suggestion	with arguments	In Ibsen, Pirandello, Shaw and Miller, the spectator is the recipient of as many arguments as one finds in the Epic Theatre. Brecht did not invent the dramatic dialectic, he merely insisted on its supremacy.
sensations are preserved	till they become insights	When recollected, the sensations of the theatre-experience yield the insights. In Brecht as in the Dramatic Theatre, the clarity of the insight is related to the effectiveness of the dramatic sensation.
man is given as a known quantity	man an object of investigation	In plays wedded to Marxist theory, the object of investigation is often to prove known theses. Besides, in the plays of Beckett and Pinter (which belong more to the Dramatic Theatre than they do the Epic Theatre), man is far from being a known quantity; he is constantly being explored and questioned.
man unalterable	alterable and altering	In no play is man unalterable. The whole concept of dramatic progression assumes the alterability of man—from good to bad; from ignorant to wise; from servant to master.
tense interest in the outcome	tense interest in what happens	What happens *is* the outcome. If one is interested in what is happening at the moment, one is automatically interested in the outcome as well. Where does one end and the other begin.

one scene exists for another	each scene exists for itself	Even in Brecht, scenes do not exist for themselves. If there wasn't a dramatic consistency the Brechtian theatre wouldn't exemplify rationalism as much as it does. In Brecht, episodic sequence is built up like a reasoned argument; every point impinging on the general thesis for which all have been created.
the world is what it is	the world is what it is becoming	In countless dramas (Ibsen, Büchner, Chekhov, Gorky, Sartre), the world is shown to be gravitating towards new conditions. 'The world is what it is' is the quintessential lunacy. Nobody knows *what* it is. Every play including Brecht's, provides a partial insight and a temporal view.
what a man should	what man must	In the polemical drama of the Dramatic Theatre, the assumption is *always* what man must.
his instincts	his reasons	It is not possible to dissociate cleanly a man's instincts from his reasons since both are constantly interacting. Reason and instinct coalesce in all plays; it is simply a matter of which you choose to emphasize, and in the Dramatic Theatre, reason has often been given priority (Pirandello, Anouilh, Montherlant, Sartre, Shaw).
thought determines reality	social reality determines thought	This is a philosophical distinction and a moot point. In the socially-oriented plays of the Dramatic Theatre, Brecht's assumption has always been the pivotal factor. In the left-wing social tradition in America and the post-war French drama, social reality has frequently determined thought. (It is significant that most of these plays now appear to be terribly dated.)

In the plays of Bertolt Brecht, a sustained form of indicational acting will serve very nicely. But I do not believe that a three-dimensional, empathic and emotionally-based approach would in any way destroy their effects. It is significant that audiences continue to feel empathy and become involved no matter how vigorously Brecht tries to disillusion them. Breaking the Fourth Wall, eliminating scenic authenticity, dispensing with coloured light, disrupting the chain of events, ignoring tempi—all of these things have not overcome the spectator's desire to feed on make-believe. And this is so because it still *is* make-believe.

On the variety stage, there was no pretence about fictional situations. The music hall performer was patently on *that* stage, playing to *that* audience; his only gesture to make-believe was the painted drop behind him. His theatre was as vitally existential as Brecht's tried to be; as Meyerhold's was. And yet, the music hall public was transported; the illusion created; the reality of the present moment transcended. Illusion is not the exclusive property of the stage; it is the built-in predisposition of the spectator. If one wanted to remove it really, one would have to lacerate the viscera of a man's imagination. But as long as that remains intact, everything that unfolds on a stage will be somewhat magical; somewhat unreal; somewhat illusionary—and still thoroughly credible.

★ 13 ★

Notions on Emotion-Memory

THE MOST popular of the Method exercises is without doubt the Emotional-Memory or Emotional-Recall. In this exercise, the actor is asked to reconstruct a highly-emotional experience from his past life so as to recreate in himself the feelings associated with it. The mechanics vary. He can either *think back* to the event in silence, or try to reconstruct it verbally, or evoke it in a parallel situation. In each case, however, the object is to experience in the present chosen emotions from the past.

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The assumption behind all acting-training is that a value exists which can be transferred to the performance. It is this assumption which justifies (if only just) the exaggerated Method-exercises in which actors simulate washing-machines, malted-milks, trees and stones. But the value of the emotional-memory exercise ends as soon as the actor leaves the floor. The emotional impact, no matter how striking—no matter how profound—no matter how undeniable—cannot be transferred to the play, and the reflective process by which it is produced in the class-room cannot be

applied to performance without upsetting the natural rhythm of that performance.

The reproduction of intense emotionalism in such exercises proves only that the actor is capable of experiencing certain feelings; it does not necessarily prove he is capable of controlling them in performance, nor does it insure that he will experience them in performance. It testifies only that the actor possesses a nervous system and a memory and that in isolated circumstances the two can combine to reproduce the physical sensations occasioned by past experience. It *is* important for an actor to know just how much he can feel, if only to point up his emotional limitations, but it is misleading for an actor to assume that the ability to undergo emotionalism automatically implies the ability to reproduce it. (If the manifestation of emotion was all that was required then the civil servant, the bricklayer and the chimney sweep could compete with the greatest dramatic actors.)

It is contrary to logic, contrary to dramatic progression, and contrary to the spontaneous nature of acting for a performer to inject emotional-memory while performing. Contrary to logic because it is incredible that an actor bemoaning the death of his wife should be mentally occupied with the death of his poodle; contrary to dramatic progression because in attempting to fetch back to past incidents the actor necessarily breaks contact with his theatrical immediacy (the present business of his present scene), and contrary to acting-nature because it treats the actor as a kind of mechanical emotional-dispenser rather than an interpretive-artist creating organically.

An audience does not go to *King Lear* only for the storm scenes, or to *A Streetcar Named Desire* only to see Blanche's breakdown. They go to witness the full swell of living which culminates in those 'high moments,' and if the actor is

properly geared to his role, the scenes leading to the climaxes are charged with just as much interest as the 'big moments.' If he is submerged in character during the course of his play the attempt to temporarily forsake character in order to evoke an emotional-memory is the height of impertinence. Its very illogic dooms it to failure. An actor cannot plunge into the past circumstances of his personal life without taking leave of his character and when, in a moment's time, he returns with the required feeling, it is very likely that what he projects will be inapproriate; too much or too little; too strong or not enough. In unhitching himself from character for only a moment, he breaks the life-rhythm of his performance, and no matter what he brings back to revive it with, the breakage is just long enough for something essential to expire.

The best way to insure the proper expression of the appropriate emotionalism is for the actor to involve himself in the substance of the scene. To believe *its* reality and respond to *its* stimuli. If he psychologically absorbs the content of his scene, there is no need for him to fetch back to past incidents. He has all the stimulus for emotionalism immediately at hand. If, in the past, a series of tragic circumstances produced anguish, it is reasonable to assume they may again—if the actor can lay his feelings bare to them as they unfold in the play.

It is infantile, shortsighted and psychologically insupportable to assume an actor will experience the same intensity on the stage as he does in real life. The basic assumption with which an actor walks on the stage steels him from all physical hazard. It is as ridiculous to talk of the actor *really* fainting in a scene of high tension as it is to think of him really bleeding in a death-scene. The actor (like the audience) knows what he is about. That psychic-producer which directs his inner motions is fully aware of the fabrication

of events. But, the whole point of the actor's work is to overcome the obvious fabrication; to—no matter how one wriggles to escape the cliché—make it real, so as to make it interesting, so as to make it dramatic. Swallowing whole the lie in which he finds himself is his surest means of experiencing its truth.

If the actor is unable to feel the proper heat of a scene, his best course is to ride its warmth. If he is called upon merely to insert isolated physical reactions (tears, laughter, fear, etc.) and nothing more, and he is able to produce these easily by means of emotional-recall, there is nothing to prevent him from doing so. The automatic insertion of automatic emotions is best achieved by automatic means. But if his emotionalism immediately links itself to some other passage in the scene; if his tears or laughter or fear immediately connects with adjoining dramatic values, it is safer for him to remain concentrated on his scene and not divert his mental film-track with frames snipped from other times and places. For even when emotional-recall is a valid expedient for an automatic climax, it is a psychological diversion and cannot help but clutter the mind with alien matter. Unless, of course, the specific emotional-memory is identical with the situation of the play. But then, if the resemblance between the play and the personal experience is so striking it will have begun to correspond long before the actual performance, and the benefits of the actor's past experience will have been nourishing the role throughout the rehearsal-period. By performance-time, the emotional coincidence will have become accepted and familiar.

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There is one school of thought which claims that emotional-memory is justified during the rehearsal period as it

lubricates the actor's sensibility and enables him to *feel* certain climaxes which he could not achieve without these aids. If the sensations produced by emotional-recall developed the actor's susceptibility to the moods he must convey, it would be helpful. But the actor may tend to rely on the past incentive, and as rehearsals progress, the emotional departure—at a given point—becomes implanted. This is tantamount to rehearsing in a five-minute coffee break or the moments spent waiting for the drone of an airplane to die away. It is the installation of *means* in a design which is supposed to consist exclusively of *ends*.

Emotionalism is never analagous to the degree that one feeling can serve the turn of another. The death of a puppy does not stir the same sense of loss as that evoked by the death of a mother, and the death of a mother is not precisely the same as the loss of a wife. The sense of disgust prompted by an open lavatory is not really akin to the revulsion produced by an unfaithful lover. The exultation which marks the appearance of an old friend believed dead is of a slightly different temper than that produced by the discovery of a lost wallet. But for the emotional-memorists, these are *analogous* experiences, and as such considered useful. One can visualise without too much difficulty, the subtle differences which could arise from such facile substitution.

Of course we are assuming the performing-actor is capable of launching an emotional-memory in the thick of a play whose events are unrelated to that memory. This is an audacious assumption on anyone's part. When playing, an actor's awareness is so desperately centred upon the mechanics of his role (lines and moves) that he has his hands full simply following the given route of a play. To speculate upon an elaborate deviation to old-school days or last sum-

mer's picnic, is to give the actor credit for more control than he possesses. But I will not pursue this tack as it might very well lead to the conclusion that the performing-actor is in fact a mindless creature given to the execution of hypnotically-induced sounds and motions; a discovery which would no doubt depress all of us.

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If we look at the emotion-memory squarely, we see not only an acting-exercise but a great boon for the ego, a classroom toy, and a ginger-peachy parlour-game. In London and New York the emotion-memory has been (and is) all of these things. The actor enjoys the sense of personal release the exercise affords. Its successful execution invariably provokes discussion concerning the details of the event and frequently carries with it an unspoken tribute to the actor's emotional capacity. The actor (whose ego is king-size to begin with) will, after his first scene (the exercise) immediately play another (himself recounting himself), and the study of the drama will slowly convert into an egocentric charade in which actors are always too eager to participate.

In New York of course, it is difficult to speak of emotional-memory without noting its relation to psychoanalysis. In a country wracked with neurotics or pseudo-neurotics, a country where the craze for physical health has, in the past ten years, been replaced by the mania for mental health; in a country whose drama is carefully verified according to Freudian behaviour-patterns and invariably concerned with trauma, hysteria or psychosis, it is very easy to see how the subjective, emotional-memory exercise can be wrenched out of acting technique and relished for its own sake.

Anyone who attempts to analyse those qualities which

constitute the actor cannot merely stop at the technical accoutrements of a good voice and a flexible body, but must inevitably examine the very roots of that *character* which is attempting to create characters. This is what fosters the egotism of many actors (here, egotism can be likened to rheumatism or astigmatism or any other form of sickness which infers abuse to some part of the body). The actor uses his ego as unavoidably as the boxer uses his fists, and the hazards in each profession are equally as great. To an actor, ego is not only the tool of his trade but the prop of his life. Outside the ring, the boxer can stuff his fists into his pockets to keep them out of harm's way, but an actor's ego is always exposed, the constant object of blissful inflations and remorseful deflations. The term 'shop talk' has no real pertinence for the actor. Everything that affects his life—no matter how alien and how seemingly removed from the stage—forms part of his artistic backlog.

The emotional-memory exercise can be a sort of spiritual inventory of an actor's innermost feelings. The richest of these memories (from an artistic standpoint) may be rooted in the most painful incidents; the effects of a trauma, the result of an old hysteria, the sudden release of a pent-up suppression, etc. The actor, in foraging about in these memories, is expected to treat red-hot emotional coals as if they were functional artistic blocks. He is expected to mechanically filter his profoundest sensations in order to extract their properties and re-compose them in performance. This is a process which compels the actor not only to recall his feelings, but to analyse and *understand* them. And it is the very preposterousness of that study which inclines the actor towards neurosis.

The alternative to the conscious injection of emotional-memory is a full-bodied deeply-rooted, mentally-alert sense of contact. The need for contact (in the technical sense of

player-communion and in the wider sense of one-ness with the play's ideas) can never be minimised. It is man's contact with life (the coming together of sensibility and circumstance) which produces every kind of living reaction. When this contact occurs between man and the conflicts which beset him, life yields drama. There is no reason why this principle should be altered in the case of the drama. One qualifies it by pointing out that in the drama the result of conflict is specifically spelled out (So-and-so cries, So-and-So commits suicide; So-and-So lives happily ever after) and so the actor is obliged to marshal his feelings to arrive at a prescribed result. But the object is to get there without letting on that you know precisely where you are going. Every actor's method demands that he arrange for himself a series of emotional strata, his job then being to gravitate naturally from one stratum to the other. This is his route and he maps it out for himself. But once his *method* pinpoints the delicate little convolutions by which he leaves one stratum and goes to the next, he is in danger of exposing the fact that he has a method. Emotional-memory during performance presents just such a danger. It distracts the actor from his natural course and, in seeking an artificial boost in order to attain a difficult height, the actor is frequently catapulted past his mark. Even if he lands squarely, it is often in a frame of mind which makes the next ascent confusing or impossible.

It is high time the element of mystique was removed from emotion-memory, and actors were made to realise the limitations of a device whose greatest efficacy is in the classroom, and whose practical application—even when feasible—is extremely dangerous. And stemming from that, it is also time that the gulf was removed between the actor who trains and the actor who plays, so that drama-training was no longer thought of as the bottom rungs of a ladder

the top of which signifies paid employment, but was looked on as a ladder in its own right; a ladder like that of the fireman's which, when confronted with greater heights, lengthens into twice its size.

Once acting achieves the craft-status of music or dance and acting-exercise is taken as much for granted as a singer's scales or a dancer's limbering, then perhaps, the actor will be able to walk through that door marked *Artists Only* and feel the title aptly describes his calling.

★ 14 ★

The Actor Improvises

PART ONE

IMPROVISATION IS the primordial form of theatre. It may very well have been the first kind of formal theatre ever practised, preceding the ancient Greek drama by centuries. It was the instinctual drive which first made man try to imitate the life around him, and the ancients considered its nature so divine that they utilised it in worshipping their gods.

When the Romans had got a bellyful of the weighty Greek drama, they instituted the first formalised improvisatorial theatre. Roman mimes were a thoroughly licentious, phallephoric comedy which parodied the mythological deities and took some comic swipes at the contemporary Greek tragedians. It was a masked comedy and judging from the props and costumes, a highly-stylised art-form.

But improvisation didn't really arrive until the early sixteenth century when the *Commedia del Arte* took over public squares in cities like Florence and Bologna. People tend to think of the Italian comedians as sixteenth century buskers whose appeal was limited to the public-saloon set, but in fact these companies played before princes of state

and church and, at their zenith, were greatly in demand throughout Europe.

To describe this theatre most accurately, one need only scan the various names by which it was known. Commedia Improvisa (improvised comedy); Commedia a Sogetto (subject comedy); Commedia Non Scritta (unwritten comedy); Commedia Maschera (masked comedy); Commedia del Arte All' Improviso (professional improvised comedy). And one gets the impression that the reason the Italians put such stress on the 'professional' part of their title was so as to distinguish themselves from their uncouth amateur imitators. The members of the leading companies (La Gelosi, etc.) were thorough-going theatre-professionals versed in singing, dancing, juggling, clowning and acrobatics.

Commedia was not completely improvised. Actors made up their speeches as they went along but plot, locale and character-types were all fixed beforehand. (When old scripts refer to such things as "The Catching The Fly Bit" or "The Shoelace Bit" or "The Helping Master Dress Bit," we get a good idea of just how formularised many of the improvisations were.) Before the show, the company manager would tack up the outline of the play being performed that afternoon. It would not take any of the actors by surprise as the story, or some form of it, had usually been played hundreds of times before and, as each actor played the same character for most of his life (*Commedia del Arte* probably originated the hated type-casting), there were no confusions about who was to play what.

The Commedia players were the innovators of many things. They were the first to popularise a people's comedy; a comedy with which the public could identify itself and a comedy derived, no matter how outlandishly from real domestic situations. They introduced the slapstick (both as art-form and prop) and if they weren't the first of the road-

companies, they were certainly one of the first. But perhaps their most valuable innovation was the Ensemble; the permanent company to end all permanent companies. It was a permanence maintained by intermarriage, communal travel and communal living, and perpetuated by the transfer of roles from father to son.

Commedia was strictly an Actors' theatre. The actor was the star, the writer, the producer and the musician. Never before (and never since) have the various elements of drama been so finely concentrated in one artist. Indeed today, the specialisations have become so marked that it is almost inconceivable that an actor should do more than act.

After the *Commedia del Arte,* improvisation languished in Europe, but the impact of the Italian players was to be found in the drama of the next two centuries. Machiavelli, Molière, Shakespeare, Jonson, Wycherley, Congreve—even Goldoni (who hated the Italian comedians) all found themselves depicting types patterned on the Commedia stock-characters. Such iron-clad conventions as the comic servant, the boasting soldier and the possessive father can all trace their progeny back to the Italian comedy. But after the eighteenth century, improvisation as a thing-in-itself led a sheltered existence until the early 1900s when Stanislavsky reclaimed it and put it to work as an aid to acting.

Stanislavsky was a staunch believer in the benefits of improvisation and he was himself a brilliant improviser. Viktor Stanitsin, the present Artistic Director of the Moscow Art Theatre recalled an instance in which Stanislavsky had recourse to improvisation.

During his early tenure as an actor, Stanitsin, under Stanislavsky's direction, was playing the role of Ivan the Fool in a fairy-tale by Tolstoy. A rather solid, serious type even then, Stanitsin couldn't muster up the necessary *naïveté* and childlike impishness demanded by the role.

Stanislavsky invited him to his house for extra rehearsals. When Stanitsin arrived, he found the tall, owl-faced producer sitting on the floor surrounded by dozens of toys. Stanislavsky motioned Stanitsin to join him on the floor, and the perplexed Stanitsin sat himself down wondering what all this was in aid of. All the actor's respectful requests to commence work on the script were subtly dismissed by Stanislavsky who continued to manipulate the toys and urged Stanitsin to do the same. Feeling one had to humour the great man's whims, Stanitsin began toying with the knick-knacks. Before long, the wheeled, sprung, tooting, snapping objects had cast a veritable spell, and the two men became heartily engrossed in childs' play. "There," Stanislavsky suddenly called out. "Now you've got it! That's what Ivan is like; just like that!"

The Group Theatre in adopting the Stanislavsky System likewise took over the System's preoccupation with improvisation. In the early training days, its members created scenes which, in all likelihood, have never been equalled anywhere in the world. The intense experimentation which was later to thoroughly envelop the Method began at about this time. The Group performed improvisations based on unrelated words, inspired by paintings, suggested by music —and sometimes played in a gibberish dialogue which helped break down the stale crusts of formal language. Harold Clurman in his book *The Fervent Years* recalls an improvisation played by Robert Lewis in which the actor went through the motions of his ordinary morning toilet to the accompaniment of Walt Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric". Clifford Odets, the literary discovery of the Group, included an improvisation in his play *The Country Girl* ("Winter Journey"). Performed on Broadway by Paul Kelly, each evening the actor had to improvise one of his opening scenes. Improvisations have been slowly in-

sinuating themselves into several modern productions. In the London version of *Hatful of Rain,* Sam Wanamaker improvised his drunk-scene every evening. In Theatre Workshop's production of *You Won't Always be on Top,* a great network of improvisation was thrown around a play which, in essence, was only two-thirds scripted. At the In-Stage Group in London, a series of improvised scenes have served as the basis for half a dozen written one-act plays.

At some point, probably after the impact of the Moscow Art Theatre, improvisation became a standard part of drama training. Today it is the staple of many drama schools in America and is becoming more and more prevalent in England.

Which just about brings us to our topic:

★ 15 ★

The Actor Improvises

PART TWO

For the most part, improvisation in the British drama school is useless. It is entered into in the same spirit as charades; is such a source of childish delight and indiscriminate amusement to teacher and student alike that its instructive value is practically invalidated.

Or perhaps it is difficult to conceive of any 'instructive value' in what is so patently a sport; a classroom diversion which tickles the imagination and is so "jolly useful" in dispelling British restraint. Improvisation is so doggedly equated with free-for-all in the drama-schools that its intrinsic worth and practical application is lost on even the brightest student-actor. He grows into artistic maturity remembering improvisation as the occasional levity in what was otherwise a rigorous training for the theatre.

Improvisation has many uses but, broadly speaking, its two main functions are: (1) as an emotional limbering for the actor, and (2) as a production-stimulant. Before we explore either of these we ought to try to see the virtues of improvising as opposed to acting in a play.

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Despite a jargon which emphasises 'inner truthfulness'

and 'sincerity,' the theatre is usually a place of *concealment,* and its insistence upon honesty sounds dangerously like the compulsions of a chronic liar.

The ordinary writer, fired by some pale imitation of a work which was itself a derivation from some familiar source, slaps together his version of other men's leavings and fashions a 'new play.' This play represents the most recent mask in a parade of disguises which, through the years, have kept the truth of the writer's subject swathed in conventional trappings. The actor, confronted with the writer's eclectic disguise, fishes around in his own rag-bag and patches together a mask which is more or less the equivalent of the writer's. In presenting this mask to his audience, he merely rearranges the crêpe, putty, postures and paints which have successfully concealed him in the past. This done, the masked actor vaunting the writer's disguise, steps before an audience weaned on dissemblance, and theatrical art picks up where it left off.

Concealment is the very instrument of the theatre (that is why it turns out the lights before it sets to work) but its main purpose and its desire is to Reveal. Perhaps the main reason it fails is because it is already provided with such a well-stocked arsenal of artifice. It is the very presence of the theatre which encourages the 'theatrical'; the outrageous availability of ruses, counterfeits, and devices-of-deception which filter and clog the theatre's essential purity.

But the improvising-actor has recourse to none of these. If he snatches at the clichés of the writer, it is only because excessive exposure to them has tainted his mind. If he lapses into the hollow strutting of the 'drama,' it is not because a banal script insists upon it, but perhaps because these stage-postures have become second nature. However, once he is on his own, free of the oppressive influence of script and stage, there is a good chance that he will not lapse

into his conditioned-reflexes, and perhaps quite accidentally, he will begin drawing from his real Self and producing honest reactions.

The improvisation offers this opportunity. The character reveals the actor because the character *is* the actor; and it is through his conscious and unconscious choices that he becomes known. (Just as writers and poets, by selecting just such an image and just such a theme, reveal themselves in every moment of their work.)

The ultimate benefit is a realisation of Self; of who the actor is and how he reacts to various situations. In the freedom of the improvisation, the actor taps the feelings he will later have to pump into the written text. The advantage of discovering them in improvisation is that they exist there with a fullness which is necessarily filtered and condensed in the written script. The improvising actor learns what the full-blooded emotion really feels like and also what it naturally leads to. Later, when he requires this emotion in a play, he will be able to express its shadings accurately because he has known the full colour. And, because he develops a sense of natural progression, he will be able to catch the untrue reaction or illogical turn of events when it appears in a play. Improvisation makes him a keener critic of the drama, and consequently, a better interpreter of it.

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Buried deep within every good script is that sense of play which makes it potentially good theatre. At first readings very often, because the play is delightfully fresh, one captures this 'sense of play,' but once rehearsals have got under way and scenes are reiterated day after day that freshness is dispelled.

Through improvisation, it is possible to recover that sense-of-play. By assigning a loose outline to a group of actors, the producer restores that frame of spontaneity the fixed text has methodically filled in. Within that loose outline (assuming that it roughly resembles some section of the play in rehearsal), the actors mingle with the root-feelings of the work they have now come to know only by its boughs and blossoms. The purpose of throwing them right back to the roots of the play is to check the course they have already travelled; in a sense, to tally up their acting-total with the play's original equations.

Another value of improvisations-around-the-play is that they uncover new aspects of character.

Theoretically, a play is two and a half hours of life wrenched out of the lifetime of its characters; those two and a half hours representing The Event; a synthesis of everything which has gone before. Those two and a half hours constitute the actor's world. But since they are theoretically wedded to the time preceding, it is necessary to know what happened in the past. In round-table discussions (when they are exceedingly ambitious) the past events of a play may be touched upon, but a passing verbal analysis doesn't go very far and it leaves no imprint on the mind. Once rehearsals are under way, the actor has quite forgotten the ingenious observations of his early readings. But if the most pertinent of those past events are performed in an improvisation, they become palpable to an actor. When he thinks back to them, it is not to a mental speculation but to an experience shared with other characters. It is a kinesthetic memory of a (theatrically) real event, and as a result of it, the actor acts on certain assumptions which, without improvisations, he might never have stumbled across.

The danger here is that in devising scenes around a given

text, the actor may invent a situation in which the incidents either contradict the character as drawn, or embroider him with a lot of irrelevant traits. If the actor carries over these irrelevancies into the text, it will confuse the spectator who, unaware of the improvisation, has no frame of reference for what appears to be unprecedented behaviour.

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To combat that laxity which dwindles spontaneous acting into horseplay, an improvisation should always have a particular purpose. It can be entered into for the creation of moods, or the expression of character, or the playing of objectives, or as a demonstration of tempi and rhythms—any number of solid, dramatic reasons.

If its object is the creation of mood, for example, then the scene automatically moves towards the fulfilment of a particular objective. It hurls the mind into one set of considerations and automatically eliminates scores of others. If I am obliged to create the mood of an unexpected homecoming, for instance, I occupy myself with certain pertinent considerations; who is coming home; from where; how long has he been gone; for what reason did he go; for what reason does he return; how do others feel about his return; how does he feel about being back; etc. The answers to such questions provide the materials for the scene and their proper realisation establishes the desired mood.

In referring back to acting-specifics (credibility, contact, inner truthfulness, etc.) an improvisation tends to establish values. The actor comes to learn that acting is *good* when credibility is not violated; when he has made genuine contact with his fellow-players; when he has conveyed a truthful emotional climax. He comes to learn that acting is *bad* when his choices are wildly melodramatic and illogical;

when he is so preoccupied with his own performance that he doesn't register the presence of others; when he sidesteps the emotional high-point and resorts to a convenient cliché. Eventually, improvisation becomes his own personal laboratory in which he experiments with such basic elements as contact, concentration and involvement.

Since improvisation is, in all essentials, acting, the actor carries over his discoveries to the written text. He applies the same criteria to his play-performance, constantly censuring those faults which invalidated the improvisation. Also, he begins to look critically at his fellow-players; to question the sincerity of *their* responses and the logic of *their* actions. This may bring about controversy and more dressing-room vehemence than is desirable, but a minor hassle is a small price to pay for a major insight.

If improvisation is not related back in this way then it destroys all relation between acting and value-judgment. Of course it still has the advantage of being 'fun' and it still helps the actor to 'relax,' but its fun is commingled with artistic obtuseness, and its relaxation becomes deadly as actors learn to feel comfortable in scenes which may be shot through with acting-faults. I have witnessed several such improvisation-classes in London. After an hour's time in which perhaps three individual groups performed three separate scenes each lasting approximately twenty minutes, time was called and the class dispersed. Afterwards the actors discussed their scene among themselves. The talk was casual, couched in general terms and, because all were equally liable, marked by very little critical candour. Nor do I believe a better appraisal would have resulted if actors had been more outspoken. The actors themselves cannot be expected to know what they did. (They know what they *feel,* but they don't know what they did!) And if their only criterion is personal reaction, then evaluation is open

to all the eccentricities and prejudices of ' personal reaction.' It was the instructor's task to take fifteen or twenty minutes at the end of class to describe what he out of a (one assumes) critical perspicacity, saw and felt; to single out moments of striking rectitude and points of shallow play-acting; to note moods which may have been conveyed so that actors, thinking back to their scene, could gauge whether or not their contribution helped or hindered that mood. The value of an improvisation, like the value of a rehearsal, becomes minted when the producer retraces the course of the actor's work and gives it a qualified appraisal.

At the In-Stage Company in London, the assumption is that an actor must be more than an emotional sprinkling-system. He must also possess certain basic knowledge about the structure of plays and the manner in which playwrights realise their aims. Towards this end, the actors of the company spend several minutes devising the scene they are to improvise. First they are given the thread of a story, and usually, where it takes place. The characters are then roughly sketched in by the producer, and the general direction of the scene briefly described. All of this is deliberately vague and sketchy so that all the pertinent details of character and action can be provided by the actors themselves. And yet, not so vague that the actors have to strain themselves with the creative task of ' making up a story.'* Although a certain literary intelligence is presumed on the part of the actors, they are never expected to function as

* This is the usual procedure, but for other exercises which lay greater stress on the imagination the actors are given much less to work with (possibly a title, or a one-line objective) and then they provide the full dramatic design. My experience has been that this is not as useful as giving the actor a more or less generalised outline. The imagination which should go into playing is often diverted into play-making, and as the nature of improvisaton prevents elaborate construction, all of these imaginative efforts are usually wasted. In improvisation classes it is easy to lose sight of the fact that an actor is primarily interested in acting, and that one should exploit his abilities in that area where he presumes to have them.

full-fledged playwrights, but only as actors with greater jurisdiction over their material than is customary.

The group then plots the scene discussing character and action as they proceed. (This plotting-period used to take fifteen to twenty minutes; after six months it was brought down to five.) When the ideas are more or less agreed upon, the actors set themselves upon the practice-stage and play.

Through this plotting and planning, the actor experiences a curious sense of ownership. The character he is working with is all his; it is not on loan from a playwright nor bounded by another man's arbitrary decisions. It is totally his own and can be as ambitious as the actor chooses to make it. Being in charge of the character in this way, and to a limited extent in charge of the scene in which he is placed, the actor instinctively animates it with material drawn from his own being. It is his ' creation ' in a way that is impossible with a *given* character. This sense of personal possession encourages him to give this character many things he would not dream of giving another. All those innate personal traits which are uniquely his and which, since this character is also his, he bestows generously. A kinship grows up between character and actor which is the result of a total identification. The kind of identification, it should be noted, which when it occurs in a play, creates something like Barrymore's Hamlet, Robeson's Othello or (if I may be permitted a parochial reference) Brando's Stanley Kowalsky.

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I find that to repeat an improvisation places it on a completely different footing. The great virtues of improvisation are their spontaneity, their gift of freedom, their utter

accessibility to anything the actor decides to insert. To play the same scene again is almost certainly to ask actors to recreate the values of their first performance, and as these values are essentially spontaneous, it is impossible to do this. The reiteration of an improvisation, if it is lucky, contains sputterings of its former *brio*, but is now hounded by the compulsion to repeat methodically what was initially a natural burst of essentially method-less feeling. One can repeat a situation ten or twelve times and eventually fashion it into a coherent, nicely-edited scene, but it doesn't seem to me that that is the function of improvisation. To re-do and re-fashion already implies a desire to create a deliberateness of form whereas an improvisation, by nature and by definition, is loose in form and deliberate only in emotional content. The process of going back and trying to finalise actually dries up those hidden springs which fed the original scene. The energy spent in trying to concretise a scene is better spent on improvising another. Once the actor is involved in play-production, there will be plenty of opportunity to harden acting into a fixed mould. Improvisation should supplement play-production; not compete with it.

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The charge that improvisation encourages glibness is true only when the improvisation is not afterwards evaluated in the light of essential dramatic criteria. If the premise behind improvisation is simply " make up a little story and have a good time " then certainly the success of that ' little story ' will owe a great deal to the verbal fluency which sustains it. But if an improvisation has an acting objective, i.e., to see that actor A obtains his desire in spite of obstacles put up by actor B, then a situation has been created in which essential dramatic factors are being dealt with. Glibness

may still result but the scene now has alternatives to it; it now has positive acting-goals to reach. As these goals will necessitate words, words will come but because they will have been *necessitated* by the action, they will not be words for their own sake.

When glibness invades a scene, it is very often because the actor has been psychologically coerced into it. When an actor has no real task to occupy him then the insertion of wit or rapid patter helps to fill the dramatic void. But when an actor is dramatically employed, no void exists. In its place is the dramatic action which, if it is intrinsically dramatic, needs not utter one word and stirs no craving for speech. Glibness is often an accurate barometer. When it overpowers a scene, you can be sure the scene is inwardly barren and trying to cover its nakedness with words.

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It should go without saying that the mere act of improvisation does not automatically confer benefits. Here, as in everything else, we must take into account the human factor. There are certain kinds of actors who, because they possess disruptive faults, invariably produce improvisations which are totally useless.

One such is the actor with a marked intellectual proclivity who continually finds himself theorising a situation instead of being dramatically involved in it. All his reactions come out as cerebral responses to the *idea* of what is taking place. The scene tends to become polemical or discursive and, one after another, each emotional beat gets iced over with intellect. For such actors, intellect is frequently the shield which protects them from the slings and arrows of acting-conflict, or the dramatic extension of a personal defensiveness. They never come to grips with life without

wearing their intellectual mittens; and so in improvisation, the mittens persist.

Similar to the Intellectualist but less discernible is the type we might call the Verbalist. (The object of these titles is to facilitate recognition; not to delineate hard-and-fast categories.) This actor is not necessarily an intellectual but he is very adept at using words. So adept that he has become more proficient at talking than he is at feeling. His life consists of wave after wave of verbal responses in which true feeling is by-passed although every word immediately suggests the feeling to which it *ought* to correspond. So immediate is this verbal response that the message never has time to reach the depths of his being. It slithers into the auditory cavity and out the vocal. Such an actor is frequently insensitive, not because he lacks sensitivity, but because he never gives his senses a chance. He is always talking off the top of his head and feeling by means of a highly-complex, time-saving device which is all antennæ. Such actors tend to become dull in improvisation because they are constantly batting out external responses to half-felt stimuli. They may be thrown onto feeling by having character-conditions created for them which block their fluency (i.e., You are a deaf mute trying to explain you've been robbed, or, You are a timid, tongue-tied schoolboy trying to make a date).

The main problem of a type we might call The Mentalist is that he does not make contact with either his fellow-players or the circumstances of the scene. Here too, as with the other types, the responses are essentially self-concious but the Mentalist hasn't even the proficiency to convey an external expedient. He is confounded by the whole business of improvisation and as he acts, one can see all the wheels spinning round in his head but the acting-engine hopelessly stalled. When he does contribute some-

thing to the scene, its intention is blatantly transparent. Such an actor is so preoccupied with the making-up of words and the contrivance of action that he divorces himself from the natural rhythm of the scene and is never truly a part of it. If he could be persuaded to throw out feelers to others, his muscle-bound consciousness might abate and outside pressures might jolt him into natural play, but this rarely happens. The problems of such a type are enormous as he is incapable of the interdependence on which all acting depends. It is doubtful he will ever mend.

The unifying fault in all these types appears to be our old bugaboo, Consciousness. With the Intellectualist, it is a hyper-awareness of the ideational implications of words and situations; with the Verbalist, it is the chronic preoccupation with surface values, and an inability to relate to subconscious happenings; with the Mentalist, it is a fatal *self*-consciousness which automatically throws a desperate glare upon everything being said and done.

I cite this to stress again the positive affinity which exists between acting and improvisation. What facilitates one, facilitates the other; what impedes one, impedes the other. And consequently, the worth derived from one can easily accrue to the other.

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Improvisation, then, has more of science in it than of sport. Its external *laissez-faire* conceals the motions of what should be a very strict inner discipline. To the modern actor, it is a useful, one is tempted to say, indispensable emotional-limbering. Its constant use trains the lively, organic, non-technical part of himself. It restores the natural elasticity rehearsals tend to constrict, and it encourages a purity of feeling which is almost alien to play-performance.

Pure, because it is uncluttered by conventional assists; pure too, because it utilises the raw material of the actor's personality from which all performances are made. Most pure, because it issues from that psychic instinct which, many aeons ago, made one Neanderthal imitate the prancing of a stag, and another Neanderthal sit up and take notice.

★ 16 ★

The New Drama and the Hi-Style

A STYLE of acting is the result of a certain kind of drama which summons it into being. We know that Marlowe's mighty epics helped create an excessive acting-style which was as theatrically flamboyant as *Tamburlaine* was poetically ornate. The 'mighty characters' involved in those 'mighty actions' found themselves moving on a dramatic plane distinctly beyond what Elizabethans would have called *natural behaviour*. When Shakespeare came on to the scene, this style was modified (we do not know to what extent) and a kind of acting must have evolved which, despite the historical incongruity, we must call realistic. The flamboyance and the realism—in balance or imbalance—co-existed right up to the Restoration period when a new style emerged, again brought into being by a new kind of play. (Although the works of Wycherly and Congreve immediately suggest extreme stylisation, they reflected the exaggerated behaviour which was characteristic of the period—and particularly of that exclusive little circle which revolved around the court of Charles II—that most splendid of all seventeenth century theatricals.)

In nineteenth-century France, the works and ideas of

Zola and Dumas evolved a new naturalism. It was a short step from there to modern realism and with Scribe, Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg that step was soon taken. Before long, these writers began to spawn theatrical equivalents. Zola conjured up his Antoine; Granville-Barker sprang full-blown from the hip of Ibsen; Chekhov luckily coincided with Stanislavsky, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, realism—as an acting style—monopolised most stages of the Western world. It should be noted that this wasn't a complete monopolisation and that at the same time realism was fortifying itself, symbolism and surrealism were already making headway. In the early 1900s, Gordon Craig, Guillaume Apollinaire, Maurice Maeterlinck, Lugne-Pöe and Yeats were already cutting across the new realism and subverting its rule, and Alfred Jarry had been around a full twenty years before all of them. Still realism predominated and the best of the (then) new drama was realistic in content and approach.

The numerous modifications of this realism in the twentieth century is a study all to itself, but if one embarked on it, it would soon reveal that every modification was in some way conditioned by the upshot of a new dramatic literature. The stiffening-up and hollowing-out of realism in England can be attributed to the fact that a style which was heated on Tom Robertson and came to boil with Ibsen eventually cooled on Henry Arthur Jones, Pinero and Galsworthy—just as it now seems to be reheating on Osborne, Wesker, Behan and Owen. The romantic realism of Turgenev and Chekhov gave over to the harsher realism of Gorky and Rakhmanov. In America, the almost-surface realism of the early O'Neil, Kingsley and Howard—gave way to the inner realism of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and William Inge. Today, although realism is by far the most accepted and emulated acting style, a new kind of

writing is threshing up a new kind of acting, and a new style is taking shape.

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The 'New Drama' originated in France; with the Irishman Beckett, the Rumanian Ionesco, and the Frenchman Genet. It found its first disciples in England in writers such as Harold Pinter and N. F. Simpson, and reached America in the works of Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit and Jack Gelber. This is a drama which has thrown Aristotelian symmetry into the garbage dump, and declared its opposition to the concept that playwriting demands the rehash of the Old Explicit. It is a theatre devoted to exploration into our secret selves; that subterranean society whose silent motions condition what we blithely call Social Reality. Its frame of reference is that vast common consciousness which binds us together—not by our institutions, idealogies or class—but by our fears, our needs, our profoundest (untaught) beliefs. This new drama does not respect the traditional literary values. It rearranges, juxtaposes and sometimes forsakes conventional language. It is a dominantly de-literalised theatre, uncluttered with exposition and proclamation; disdaining 'eloquence' and verbal conciseness, relying on mumbles, mutters, clichés and homilies, which, when we come right down to it, is our common social language. In the new drama, language has become as functional as any other dramatic element—used in the same way as a stage-gauze, existing in order to reveal something behind it in a diffused and more interesting light.

* * * *

The new plays have altered our traditional ideas about

' meaning ' in the theatre. In the older plays, there was no confusion about a play's *message*. Invariably, there were one or two scenes in which the meaning was compressed in the dialogue, or else it was clearly illustrated by the sequence of events. In the works of the new writers, meaning (or its modern equivalent, the quest for meaning) is everywhere and nowhere. It is the insinuation beneath ordinary actions and banal words. The older dramatists organised human behaviour to dramatise one or another of its purposes. The new dramatists reproduce it, realistically or abstractly, as part of a continual interrogation. And they steadfastly refuse to falsify it for the sake of narrative or dramatic sensation.

It is a drama in which, very often, the most significant actions take place off-stage so that when the characters appear they ' contain ' the drama rather than portray it. In *The Connection* for instance, where the most dramatic factors are those which turn the characters into addicts, we see only the result of those actions; a result which only *intimates* what has come before. In *The Caretaker* and *The Birthday Party* the dynamic factors of the action (viz. what is going on between the two brothers? What crime did Stanley commit?) occurred in the past and the play seems to dramatise the reverberations. In the drama of Ibsen, the actions also happened in the past, but the whole business of the play was to reconstruct and explain them. In the works of the new dramatists, nothing is that explicit. We are never given the exact reasons for behaviour, but the writer's tone suggests several and, in the better plays (those that possess an inner consistency) several interpretations are accommodated. Viewed one way, this is fraudulent playwriting; marshalling effects without reasonable justifications. Viewed another, nothing in life is to be ' explained away ' by merely revealing the pivotal circumstances. Beneath all

the 'reasons' for behaviour, is the innate irrationality of life; beneath every obvious 'reason' for action, there lurks innumerable drives whose nature is not apparent. It is somewhat like the scientific explanation of the universe which traces all phenomena back to the atom but cannot answer the fundamental question about the atom itself; the origins and meaning of that primal energy.

Certain intellectuals have lashed out at the New Drama for this very reason. They see in its mysteries and intimations, a denial of man's reason; his control of life and supremacy of will. But the New Drama does not annihilate reason nor will, just as reason and will do not pretend that the whole of life is intelligible. The scientists, the logicians, and, of course, the religicoes, recognise an Unexplored Zone. A Zone which is incomprehensible without some artificial premise like Faith or Matter. The new dramatists are exploring this zone. If it is subversive to acknowledge confusion and incomprehensibility, it is deceptive to pretend that everything is known and controllable.

Like all things 'new,' this drama has been hinted at in several of our older plays. In Chekhov, for instance, the atmosphere of an inner society is almost apparent, and the brooding pauses which trouble Chekhovian drama are the ancestors of those great, empty gaping spaces in Beckett and Pinter. In Andreyev's *He Who Gets Slapped,* the presence of this same interior world is so disturbing we are never allowed to forget it. And, I suppose, the symbolists, surrealists and poets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were all, in a sense, laying the groundwork for Ionesco, Beckett and Genet.

I have tried to suggest the literary nature of the new Drama because this is indispensable to its understanding from the actor's standpoint. This is not merely a stylistic innovation, it is a new attitude of thought and actors who

attempt to express it by employing the outdated conventions which it resembles (expressionism, surrealism, symbolism, etc.) are going to find themselves up a blind alley. Once the actor begins to recognise the intellectual complexion of these works, he can proceed to formulate the style they require. Without such recognition, he is in the position of the man attempting to view a CinemaScope film through a stereopticon.

* * * *

For the actor, the departure from conventional word values is perhaps the most alarming feature of the New Drama. In place of syntax, grammar and 'good writing,' he may find an effusive spray of cliché and homily (Ionesco, Pinter) or a highly-abbreviated, staccato dialogue with no apparent consistency (Beckett) or a juxtaposition of logic and betrayal of sense (Simpson) or murky, ulterior-motives disguised in colloquial jargon (Pinter) or an ultra-naturalistic form of inarticulateness (Gelber) or the drastic reduction of speech (Ionesco in *The New Tenant*) or its total removal (Becket in his Mime plays).

With the timber of speech being whittled down to practically nothing the actor can no longer hide behind the dialogue. Nor can he organise it for effect by 'pointing,' 'emphasizing,' 'throwing away lines,' etc. The nature of the new drama forces him to grapple with fundamental dramatic elements; the inner reality of characters rather than their verbal topography; their underlying emotions rather than the literary indication of these emotions. Or it forces him to come to new terms with old conventions. To employ dialogue which can no longer be taken at its face value which, indeed, must be constantly suspected and examined.

All of which seems to hurtle us into a different mode of playing; a different approach; a *higher* style.* High, because these works are frequently the product of a heightened consciousness not mere reportage or realistic incident conventionally arranged for dramatic effect. High, because the view of life is higher, wider, more objective, more generalised. High, too, because the new writing calls for an extension of (rather than replacement of) conventional styles of acting.

In practically all of these plays, we find that two things are always happening at once. This is not new. In the traditional drama, we are constantly aware of undercurrents and implications. But in the New Drama, the hidden content is never made apparent. It is not so much a secret withheld as it is an answer not precisely known. In a traditional play which employs undercurrents, the true intent is clearly visible beneath the outer layer. In a work by Beckett or Ionesco there are dozens of layers and they never get stripped away. The innumerable folds of the play constitute its essence, and it is *that* which the actor is obliged to convey. There is a modicum of action and a thread of narrative, but it all exists for the sake of its *intimation*; for what the play suggests and implies rather than for what it appears to state.

Approaching material of this kind, the actor has got two distinct obligations. He must operate *as character,* going about his character's business and expressing his character's subjectivity, and he must—at the same time—fulfil the *pattern* of the play, conveying the general view for which the particular circumstances have been created. Which means the actor must be consciously aware of his implica-

* In recent In-Stage experiments with the New Drama it was felt that no existing title adequately pegged the nature of the new acting, and the name Hi-Style was devised for the sake of convenience. It is employed here for the same reason.

tions, and he must, to a degree that would be unthinkable in straightforward realistic drama, *organise* those implications.

For instance: an actor playing an old man in a conventional realistic play will concern himself with the character's looks, his past life, his dominant traits, his occupation, his class—all the tangibles of his life for which he must find the proper theatrical expression. But the same actor playing the old janitor in *The Chairs* by Ionesco must, in addition to all of these things, discover the character's relation to the pattern of the play. Where, and by what means, the character suggests the futility of existence, the failure of ambitions, the impossibility of communication. To do this, the actor must be constantly in touch with the writer. For acting instructions, he must look beyond the stage directions italicised in his script. He must discern the part his role plays in the greater design which is the writer's view of the world. If he simply plays what is *apparent* from a customary, realistic standpoint, he will be playing against the grain of the given material. He will, in fact, be playing a different play from the one Ionesco wrote. No matter how effectively he brings to bear the full three-dimensionality of realism, his performance will be without that added dimension which is the style of the play. And the ingredients of that style must be drawn as much from the underlying concept as from the given circumstances.

In most plays cast in the Hi-Style, one soon becomes aware of a slightly rarefied sense of naturalism. The maids in Genet's play are patently serving-girls and, at first, we accept them as such. But after we have come to realise the nature of the game they are playing and the tenor of their relationship, we no longer look upon them as girls we might find making up rooms in a seaside hotel. As they begin to illustrate Genet's theme (are 'darkened' by the writer's

mind) their naturalism takes on other qualities. We begin to see them as symbols of a writer's idea, and they gain a new credibility. They are no longer real in the sense of identifiable characters from real life but real in the higher sense of characters who personify an idea.

It is the same in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. When the two boarders first enter, we are prepared to accept them at face value, but as they round themselves out in the course of the play, their behaviour prevents us from retaining our first impressions. As they enlarge dramatically, our inner eye distends to fit them into a wider focus. Gradually, the realistic level becomes heightened and, as extraordinary factors come into play, the ordinary circumstances are shifted on to another plane.

In *The Bald Prima Donna,* with the very first speeches we are already on the heightened level, and fully prepared for the anomalies to follow. In *Waiting for Godot,* we sense from the start that Estragon and Vladamir are not ordinary rail-riders or commonplace vagabonds. In the first place, they are in no particular locale. The setting has already begun to generalise the action and although we are given naturalistic behaviour (more or less), we are aware of a stylistic assumption. The more the characters resemble figments of the writer's imagination, that is, the more stylised they become, the more real they appear because the play's tone and the manner of the acting has already conditioned us to a different kind of reality.

In the conventional drama, the closer the character gets to the playwright (the further away from his personal reality), the more the play seems to fail. We say, it's all transparent; we can see the writer manipulating his characters; it's not real. But in the works of Ionesco or Beckett, this affinity with the writer is desirable and necessary if the action is to work properly. As with Brecht, it is drama for

the sake of the informing idea—not drama for the sake of accurate reproduction of life's externals.

In the plays of N. F. Simpson (as with the earlier Ionesco), the stylisation is concentrated in the dialogue. The proper performance depends on how accurately the actor follows the convolutions of the whimsy and the caprice of the sense. The gradation of styles (from naturalistic to Hi) is entirely conditioned by what is said, which means the actor must be constantly adjusting to external changes rather than, as with Pinter, internal shifts of character.

In Pinter, the surface-level remains realistic almost throughout, but the body of the play undergoes momentous changes. In most plays, a character's action is the result of a character's motivation. One finds reasons for a character's action by logically tracing back that action. But in Pinter, the actions do not lead back to given causes, and so it is necessary to supply them. In order for these arbitrary choices to be consistent with the play's intention, there must be a general agreement as to what the play is about and why the characters behave the way they do. I do not mean that it is necessary to devise a chart depicting what symbols stand for what prototypes, but only that in a work where several interpretations are possible, one must be chosen to the exclusion of all others. Unless the actor has an intellectual basis from which he can make character decisions, the performance will be shot through with eccentricities, and every effect will be rootless.

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The most difficult element in Hi-Style is to discover precisely where one style shifts into another. Where, for instance, naturalism tapers off into a parody of itself or heightens into surrealism, or becomes complicated with

abstract elements, or is crystallised into symbols. It is unlikely that all of these shifts will occur in the same play, but it is very likely that more than one will be at work at the same time.

The Hi-Style is not a fixed quality in the sense that the Restoration style can be said to be fixed. Sometimes it is what the naturalistic style graduates to, as in Ionesco's *The Lesson* or Genet's *The Maids*. Sometimes it is there from the start as in *The Bald Prima Donna*, *Godot* or *Rhinoceros*. Sometimes it is merely inferred as in *He Who Gets Slapped*. Sometimes *it* and naturalism co-habit the same world as in *The Caretaker* and *The Birthday Party*. Nor is it a fancy, odd, or peculiar mode of acting. Like the plays themselves, it is an outgrowth of the realistic style.

For the actor, it means a radical adjustment to the idea of motivation. Instead of playing subjective reasons, he has got to start playing objective ideas. He has to stop insisting on credibility in terms of human behaviour and concentrate on credibility in terms of the writer's version of reality. And since that version is sometimes inverted, or abstracted, or consciously rearranged for effect, the actor has to learn to give way.

For the director it means assuming a much greater responsibility than ever before. In conventional plays, interpretation is largely a matter of slanting given ideas. In Hi-Style plays, the director is frequently responsible for the basic ideas themselves. For before he can interpret a playwright's ideas, he must first extract them from the text, and in Hi-Styled plays he has much greater leeway than in the more explicit, realistic plays. Instead of merely working up three-dimensional performances (his customary duty), he must now proceed to arrange those performances so that they implement ideas which exist above and beyond each

character's individual meaning. And he must make sure that that higher meaning is reconcilable with the play's *donèes*. To a degree which should terrify us all, the director must function as *intellectual*.

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The feel of Hi-Style is not limited to the stage. In modern literature the most representative exponent would be someone like Franz Kafka; a writer who is constantly fusing the real and the unreal. The dream quality of *The Trial* or *The Castle* is precisely the quality one finds in *The Chairs* or *Rhinoceros*. The concept behind Kafka's short story "Metamorphosis" (in which a man turns into a cockroach) is strongly reminiscent of Harold Pinter's *Slight Ache* (in which a suburban author in a sense 'turns into' the silent matchseller who has been haunting his back gate). And Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* is almost a regional transplantation of *The Trial*.

If one wanted to get onto a research jag, one could bring in Grand Guignol, Edgar Allen Poe, science fiction, the horror films of the thirties, Charles Addams, etc.—but this would be useless footling. The New Drama in its finest manifestations, is itself—not merely an eclectic amalgam of 'influences.' The resemblances between Beckett and Kafka and Kafka and Pinter are not the result of deliberate borrowings, but a shared conception of life. An agreement concerning the dual nature of reality and the fluid, unknowable nature of the universe.

It would be ridiculous to speak conclusively of a trend which, despite its affinities with surrealism and symbolism, is itself barely a decade old. But it is not ridiculous to recognise that a form of drama is coming into existence which threatens to make obsolete our oldest and most serviceable

acting techniques. Because this new trend is not from Mars, but the work of men writing about the world common to us all, it does not call for a total reversal of everything we have ever learned. But because the conception of life is so strikingly different from that portrayed by the dramatists of the past two hundred years, it is necessary that we discover a new means of realising it on the stage. I have arbitrarily called this new kind of playing the Hi-Style. It matters very little what one calls it. The important thing is for actors to understand the components of the new works and to enlarge their acting means in order to express them faithfully.

★ 17 ★

In the Round

ONE IS always hearing that theatre-in-the-round confers a much greater reality. " Arena-staging," runs the homily, " really gets you inside of the play;" this intimacy being the natural result of a closer proximity between actor and audience.

As an *a priori* virtue of arena-staging this is, of course, bosh. The only certainty about the physical relationship in central-staging is that the audience is in closer contact with what might be called the ' technical reality ' of the performance; the acting-mechanisms. This bears no relation whatsoever to the artistic reality which is essentially a product of the imagination; both the actor's and the spectator's. Frequently, it is this same physical proximity which militates against the artistic reality. For, just as one steps back to view a canvas or adjusts the eye-level to read a book, there is a distance-setting which is absolutely necessary in the theatre. It is not so much a purely *esthetic* distance as it is a physical positioning which enables the spectator to register the boundaries of the projected image.

In central-staging, this positioning is frequently impossible. By removing the apex of the stage (which in proscenium theatre is usually the backwall), theatre-in-the-round

creates a mobile and ever-shifting centre. But, at almost every point, this centre incorporates the auditorium. In every play, the presence of the audience is an unavoidable additional factor. On a proscenium stage, the producer attempts to eliminate all gesture or movement which is either irrelevant or distracting because he realises that proper production demands detailed control. In theatre-in-the-round, there is no such control. Through every stage picture, some members of the audience may rustle, chortle, sneeze, or twitch. More serious than the harm done to concentration is the fact that no stage-picture has a fixed base to which movement can be related. The traditional 'strong areas' of the stage no longer exist and terms like 'up-stage' and 'down-stage' have no meaning. In one sense, this creates a dramatic challenge to the actor and producer; but in another, it produces a mechanical problem which can only be solved in a mechanical way.

Consequently, theatre-in-the-round compels more movement than is dramatically justified. Since actors are always masked from one part of the auditorium or another (and the compulsion to remove masking dies hard), a producer feels obliged to devise movement which will at least distribute the spectacle equally among the different parts of the house. The result is often a nervous, overly-busy production in which the greatest dramatic suspense hinges on the fact that an actor may at any moment forsake one part of the audience and devote himself to another.

Of course, there are some plays which accommodate elaborate movement and here theatre-in-the-round can sometimes create a physical aura which no proscenium stage can duplicate. (I can, for instance, visualise a number of Restoration comedies—usually belted out from an inflexible downstage centre position—assuming a completely new character in the round. One also thinks of balletic

comedies like Anouilh's *Thieves' Carnival.*) But in most straight plays, movement is a finely-edited sub-structure which constantly alternates with dynamic statics and here the compulsion to circulate can be deadly.

Actors tend to enjoy central-staging. They revel in its 'greater freedom' and 'spontaneity', which is to say they enjoy the absence of directorial restrictions and indulge in the physical laxity a four-sided acting-area promotes. Subordination to a producer's stage-plan is a relatively recent forfeiture of the actor's freedom. In central-staging, the actor sees an opportunity to recapture some of that lost ground. Although the producer is ostensibly controlling movement, it is a much less rigid control—more determined by the actor's necessities than the producer's preference.

The inability to fix dramatic emphasis with any degree of certainty produces a variety of emphases which were never intended. The prosaic business of lighting a cigarette, pouring a drink or buttoning a waiscoat becomes magnified a thousand times simply because a certain section of the audience is right on top of the action. In the theatre, everything an actor does takes on a greater significance but on a proscenium stage the tertiary movements are easily lost because dramatic emphasis is being invited elsewhere. In the round, the most infinitesimal piece of business and the highest dramatic moment are subject to the same close scrutiny, and the proximity which is supposed to bring the audience closer to the play has the effect of distracting sections of it by highlighting irrelevancies.

Because of all these problems, the structure of an arena-theatre becomes a matter of primary importance. If the auditorium is too closely riveted around the acting-area, a necessary distance is lost. If the auditorium spirals too far above the acting-area—although it solves the problem of

masking—it puts the brunt of dramatic expression on the tops of the actors' heads (never a very expressive medium).

One way of creating an arena-stage which is free of these hazards is to establish a wider perimeter around the acting-area which protects the acting circle from the encroachment of the auditorium; a kind of neutral zone which physically sets off the acting-area (by only a matter of feet) and thereby acknowledges the traditional demarcation between actor and audience.* It is fatuous to argue that this destroys the 'intimate' aspect of theatre-in-the-round for the physical proximity is exactly as it would be if the first two rows were unoccupied. Besides, it should be abundantly clear that 'intimacy' is not exclusively determined by physical conditions but is a quality of the acting which an audience responds to accordingly. Although 'intimate theatre' inside the Radio City Music Hall is a rattling incongruity, it is not at all far-fetched in a proscenium theatre that seats three to five hundred persons.

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In London, at the present writing, there are only two arena-theatres and throughout England, barely half a dozen. In America, there are hundreds, the most adventurous being connected with one university or another. Although arena-staging originated in Europe, the first theatre to start the modern trend seems to have been in Seattle, Washington, where, in 1932, Professor Glenn Hughes created a make-shift arena-stage in an oversized drawing-room atop an hotel penthouse. Hughes was originally a

* The ideal way to effect this demarcation would be with spotlights so finely-poised that they created a curtain of light around the acting-area excluding all else. But overlapping light is a constant enemy in arena-theatres and there is small chance of entirely removing spills.

professional actor who later became a major influence in the American univerities. Dissatisfied with his conventional student productions, he began to experiment with more intimate forms. Hughes' original penthouse theatre (then referred to as a circus-type stage) accommodated sixty. Six years later, after conspicuous success with central staging, his specially-designed arena-theatre seated only 172—and in my view, to increase seating beyond 250 is to strain the physical resources of the circular stage. Hughes himself, discussing the structure of theatre-in-the-round, advised: "A total of three rows is ideal." In New York City, the growth of the off-Broadway theatre in the early fifties spawned innumerable experiments in arena-staging—although in most cases these theatres were, like the original Circle-in-the-Square, only three-sided. In England, one senses the beginning of a similar fringe-movement and no doubt the next ten years will yield an assortment of new shapes and sizes.

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The great incentive for arena-staging has been economic. A theatre that dispenses with elaborate settings, employs small casts and can instal itself in a hall, a basement, an attic or even a living-room is going to cost much less than a conventional production subject to an astronomical theatre-rental. From this standpoint, one can only praise a movement which puts more actors to work and gives more people more opportunities to see more plays. However, the economic virtues do not eliminate the artistic problems and it is these which I am primarily concerned with. Also, it must be pointed out that despite its high ambitions, arena-theatre has not nurtured new works peculiar to its own design. Arena playwrights—as such—have not emerged.

Arena-staging remains a novel process to which proscenium plays merely adjust, and the best of the arena-producers (Jose Quintero, Alan Schneider, John English) are men who have merely perfected the knack of circularising plays which, with Greek, Roman, Elizabethan and Oriental exceptions were intended for the picture frame.

The greatest justification for arena-theatre is the decadence and inutility of the proscenium stage whose overthrow is long overdue. Although, in my view, to leap from the square to the circle is merely perverse.

It is the shut-in quality of the picture-frame stage which cramps most modern plays; the absence of breathing-space to the right and left which forces actor and director to seek extreme remedies. Even minor modifications like a jutting forestage or a wide apron help to diminish the closeted-atmosphere of the proscenium stage and I believe that this kind of breakthrough is preferable to wholesale reversals.

But more restrictive than the outline of the stage itself is its inflexible devotion to one level. In specific cases, rostra or constructions will be used to create different levels, but the assumption is always that the stage should be a square, bare, well-planned space which, when it is nothing in particular, can always be taken for an empty room. If a more dynamic idea of the stage itself could develop; a way of seeing the stage as a series of varying strata or balanced plateaux, every facet of the theatre (acting, production, playwriting, design) would be reoriented and subsequently revitalised. The fourth-wall concept can exist just as easily perched upon a raised turn-table stage as it does within the fixed boundaries of the seventeenth century Restoration playhouse which, ironically, is also the twentieth century stage. In the twenties, men had an untrammelled vision of the theatre's possibilities. When Erwin Piscator called for " tread-mill, turntable, sunken

stage raised and lowered for changing levels, moving escalator, motorised bridges, elevators" he was visualising a theatre of infinite possibility; a stage which being structurally dynamic might nurture a drama which was likewise. In certain European playhouses, something of this kind of theatre exists, but in England and America where the real estate broker and the corporation-men own the stages and the artist is permitted only occasional lettings, the idea of a dynamic art-theatre is a voluptuous fantasy.

The most revolutionary feature of the newest West End theatre was an adjustable proscenium opening which could stretch to forty-three feet or contract to thirty-six. Being a corporation project sworn to commercial expediency, the possibility of cinema conversion was there from the start. One year after its gala opening as the newest theatre in twenty-nine years, it was already showing films. Can you visualise Stanislavsky instituting a magic lantern show at the Moscow Arts because business had fallen off? Or Louis Jouvet throwing in some vintage Disneys because his last Giraudoux was only drawing one-third capacity. Or Brecht saying to Frau Weigel, "Trot out old 'Caligary,' Helen, 'Mother Courage' is in the red."

Until the artist is in possession of the means of his production (in the Marxist sense), all discussion on theatre-design remains energetically hypothetical.

★ 18 ★

Afterthoughts

THE MORE one tries to crystallise the art of acting, the more one becomes aware of its dependence on extra-theatrical considerations. It is a little disconcerting to realise that great acting is not the sum and total of its many theoretical parts but a quantity and a quality curiously distinct from all of them. Great acting can break every rule and triumph by reversing every known principle of dramatic art. Its only immutable factor is that, at the heart of its every sublimity, one always finds a dynamic human force.

The vitality of acting is necessarily related to the vitality of the individual acting. Great actors have always been great personalities. Behind every first-rate Hamlet there has always been a first person singular of unquestionable substance. When I speak of 'great personalities' I am not referring to moral qualities, but to a degree of operativeness in the individual beyond that of the common man. A truly operative person, even if he is a scoundrel, is somehow fulfilling life's purpose more properly than the innocuous "average man." Vice possesses a vitality which can be admired in scientific isolation. The energy of malice; the compulsion of vengeance; the imaginativeness of fraud—

all of these 'vices' are intrinsically dramatic and can be converted to dramatic use. (Which is not to imply that the moral qualities are without vitality; it is only that vice, being more positive, is more arresting.)

On stage, an actor magnifies and elaborates those personal qualities which he possesses in little, and the nature of Nature is such that *all* people possess *all* qualities in little. It is the actor's task to become aware of his personal resources so as to methodically draw upon them in the act of acting. It is the extent, variety and intensity of these characteristic-components which in the end determine an actor's efficacy. For an actor can express only what he contains. The more the person is, the more the actor has to work with. For this reason (if not for half a dozen unrelated to the theatre) an actor must strive for a fullness in life above and beyond that of the common man. (Does it appear then that I believe the actor to be a kind of superman—a creature apart and superior to the humdrum transients of life? If it does not appear then it should. A man must contain a certain remarkableness if he asks to spend his life being watched by the rest of the world.)

It then becomes important to consider the kind of person who chooses the acting profession. To many, the stage is a kind of wonderful playland which offers asylum from the vexations of real life. Having the human need to experience the doldrums and dilemmas which flesh is heir to, such persons take the sting out of mortal conflict by allowing it to unfold in a world of pretence; a world in which every wrinkle disappears with a dab of cold cream and the curtain call revives all the dead. To many, acting is simply a reversion to the make-believe security of the child's world, or a domain in which they can vent all the unruly passions a prohibitive society rigidly represses. The artistic

aura which surrounds the theatre tends to dignify their escape, but the consequences of eluding life invariably affect their acting. The theatre is not a therapy and it cannot be exploited therapeutically. Half-people are not made whole in the theatre. The exacting demands of the art serve only to emphasize their personal inadequacies.

* * * *

The actor, by dint of his imaginary environment, exists as a symbol in the mind of his fellow man. Although he may despise and ignore him socially, he cannot help but be influenced by him each time he visits the playhouse. Under scrutiny, amidst the coloured trappings of his art, the actor appears as a figment of the spectator's imagination—something meaningful and illusory conjured up before the footlights. This figment engages the imagination which gives it life and thereby reveals the mysteries of existence. It is to the actor that the spectator owes the profound experiences of fear, joy, love, etc. It is the actor's simulation of these emotions on a grand scale which gives them such definition in real life. As a result of the empathy aroused in a theatre, the spectator experiences a curious dichotomy of feeling. He is touched by each theatricalised emotion and yet is aloof to all of them. Though subjectively affected, he never totally forgets that he is a bystander and so he never fully loses his objectivity. Being so close to emotional-involvement and yet so far from it is what confers that unique perspective which enables a playgoer to learn from feeling. Acting then becomes a kind of handbook of life's contents offering all the thrills of living and none of its fatality.

* * * *

Ultimately, the real impact of a play has little to do with the stark emotional effects produced in the theatre. Its real impact is felt only after the ideas which have immediately affected the immediate senses filter down to the sub-soil of our minds. Then the reverberations of our theatre-experience reach our basic concepts of life and then—and only then—can the play be said to have come to an end. In this way, every stage-play is a play of ideas. The feelings aroused by the commonplace ideas of everyday life, if they are true, eventually affect the timber of our fundamental beliefs, of which the commonplace ideas are mere shavings.

In order to achieve this powerful delayed-reaction, it is not necessary that the initial impact be striking or extreme. Very often, what seems to be the mildest artistic experience brings about the profoundest after-effect. The only sure sign that art is working upon us is the attention we give it. Attention pure and simple. Not intense emotional involvement or rambunctious participation, but simply a thorough and unbroken attention. Once this ramp has been erected between the actor and the spectator, there is no limit to the magnitude of the traffic which may pass between them.

* * * *

The greatest factor in the actor's favour is the audience's desire to be deluded. This desire is so strong that it blots out many of the transparencies which threaten to dispel their illusion. They will make elaborate mental detours in order to overlook the rickety door which will not stay shut; the garish make-up that fairly proclaims another face beneath it, the torn costume, the tattered stage-set. Everything which conspires to shake their belief. Deep down in the mind's most unfathomable recesses, the audience wants to

be lied to, and wants to be lied to well so that it need not cry, Charlatan!

Give it a tree and it will see a forest. Give it a few rocks and it will visualise a mountain. Give it a crowd of surly patriots and it will concede it is witnessing the French Revolution. Give it some archways and towers and it will imagine the Castle Dunsinane. Give it a young drama-student in a white beard and it will greet him as Methuselah, Lear or Rip Van Winkle. Give it an *ingénue* born in an East End hovel but swathed in velvet and wearing a crown, and it will bow before the Queen of England.

Give it any and all of these things and it will accept them. But if you force it to notice the plaster and the paint, it will throw your forest back in your teeth. If you confront it with a pack of awkward supers wearing three-cornered hats, it will exclaim the French Revolution was never like that. If the castle walls tremble every time Macbeth walks across the stage, it will protest that Dunsinane should be made of sterner stuff. If that *ingénue* addresses it with the gutter-speech of an illiterate flower girl, it will cry that queen is an impostor.

As the lights dim and it settles back to view the stage, the last thought in the audience's mind is to tear away the precious veils of the theatre. But once it suspects it is being *had*—once the trickery is exposed—its clamour will tumble down the doors of the playhouse.

The actor walks a very thin tightrope. If he maintains his balance, no matter how much he may reel and teeter, the audience will be with him. They will revere him as a marvel dancing on a heavenly thread. But once he falls, they will decry the madness of a two-legged man trying to walk a rope no larger than his big toe.

* * * *

The great service of dramatic art is that it affixes an order upon the universe which, in fact, the universe does not possess. As a result of this fabricated order, we begin to get a perspective on life which, *in* life, we are too busy and confused to recognise. The playwright, by apportioning out life and investing it with the unity and cohesion of his own mind, makes us a gift of his clarity. It is this clarity, interpreted by actors and actresses, which ultimately educates and civilises the world. What little we know about those secret workings of life we have gleaned through the infrequent revelations that secret art provides.

But more than anything else, the theatre is an affirmation.

On stage, we watch actors and actresses going through the business of being alive, and their activity declares: there is such a thing as life, and we all do it, very much like the actors are doing it behind the footlights. It is essential that life be relentlessly affirmed in this way. Although we see it every day of our lives, it is with such disinterested vision that we become inured to its wonder. Theatre, however, sees it only once; in the flash of a playwright's vision; in the space of two illuminative hours during which nothing is commonplace or accidental. The theatre sees *nothing but* life's wonder and, in seeing it, affirms life positively—whether the play is optimistic or pessimistic, comedy or tragedy. And in the process, the actor *does* become a kind of ultra-human being; a synthesis of all things human, for he portrays what being human looks like, feels like and, in fact, is. And because men and women assembled in theatres throughout the world look to the stage for affirmation, they must not be disappointed. Because disappointment amounts to negation, and to employ the passion and the pattern of life only to negate it is intolerable. That is why there is

nothing as lofty, reassuring and uplifting as great theatre, and nothing as contemptuous, repugnant and infuriating as bad theatre.

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